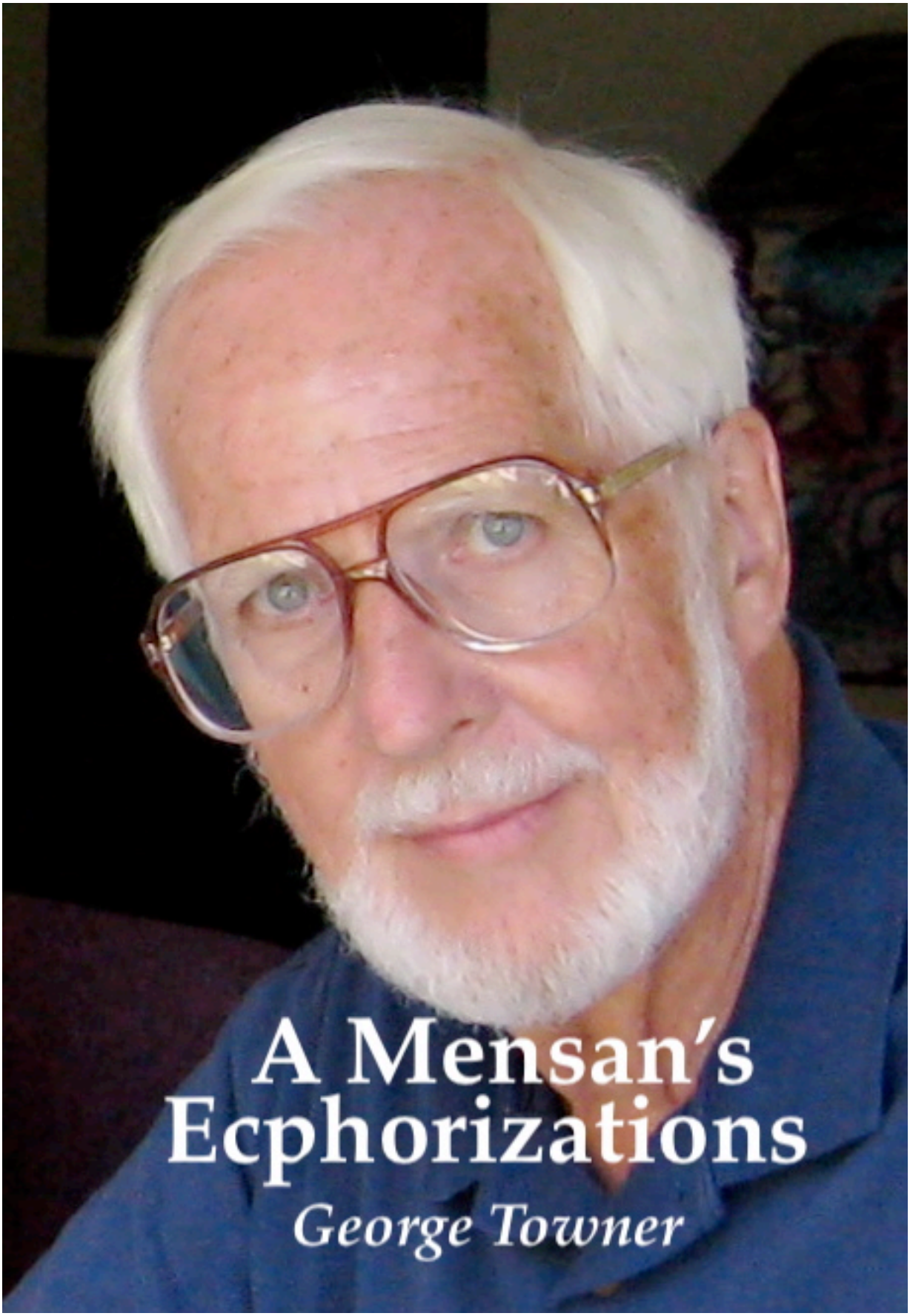
A Mensan's
Ecphorizations
George Towner

A Mensan's Ecphorizations

Stories, whimsy, articles and humor from *The Ecphorizer,* a magazine published by San Francisco Mensa members from 1981 to 1987

George Towner

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George Towner, 814 Gail Avenue
Sunnyvale, CA 94086
USA

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Foreword

> **ecphorize** *vb trans* [fr. Gr. εκφοροσ (to be) made known] To evoke ideas or dispositions from a latent to a manifest state. *cf. OED*

In the summer of 1981, while Tod Wicks and I were driving to a camping weekend, the two of us decided to start a magazine.

We had both been Mensa members for some time, and had enjoyed the odd arguments and off-the-wall articles that traditionally appeared in the San Francisco Mensa newsletter. But with the local membership hitting 3,000, the newsletter had been forced to restrict itself to business and activity notices. The good parts—the palindromic limericks, discussions of human cloning, proposals to convert redwood trees into condominiums, and so on—were gone forever. The main purpose of the new magazine was to give this essential literary flotsam a permanent home.

Tod suggested we call the new magazine *The Ecphorizer.* The verb "ecphorize" occupies an honored place in the mythology of San Francisco Mensa. A truly obscure term, it had been lovingly dredged from the depths of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and inserted in the local bylaws, where the nominations committee was instructed to "ecphorize candidacy." When the bylaws went to National Mensa for approval, they accused San Francisco of deliberate obfuscation. The local group stuck to its guns, and the battle raged for years.

The Ecphorizer started publishing monthly in September, 1981, with 152 paying subscribers. Its readership ultimately peaked at about 700. I edited it, off and on, through issue 70, which came out at the end of 1987. John Cumming edited issues 24 through 37 and Dick Amyx edited 38 through 44. During these periods I took time off to go traveling in Africa and Eastern Europe. Lots

of other people labored to make the magazine work, both contributors and production staffers. By 1987 I was married and had started a family; a number of new occupations began to fill my life. So *The Ecphorizer* found a new home with Mike Eager, who edited it into the 1990s. After reviving the magazine and editing it for several years, Tod Wicks continued to maintain it online as an archival Web site (www.ecphorizer.com/EPS/).

One perk of editing a magazine is that you can submit your own work and not worry about getting a rejection slip. I started writing a variety of articles, both casual and serious, for the enjoyment of seeing myself in print. This was also the period during which I adopted technical writing as a career. *The Ecphorizer* turned out to be a fine place to hone my skills.

As the years pass, old copies of *The Ecphorizer* are increasingly harder to come by. Like every author, I hate to go out of print. So in this little book I have gathered essentially all my contributions to the magazine—fifty pieces in all.

This book contains six sections. "Travel Narratives" relates a few incidents that happened during my trips in Asia, Africa, and Europe. "Opinions, Theories, and Whimsy" are just that—an *olla podrida* of notions that occurred to me from time to time. "Mensa Pastiches" includes several exercises in literary style, all centered around the theme of mythical Mensa chapters and their doings. "Personal Notes" adds a few pieces that don't fit anywhere else. Finally, "The Writing Game" and "The Computer Biz" present fairly serious articles about my vocation from 1983 onward—programming computers and writing technical literature for them.

So here are my ecphorizations. I enjoyed writing them, and hope you have as much fun reading them.

George Towner
Sunnyvale, California

Travel Narratives

A major event of my youth was reading Norman Ford's book, *How to Travel Without Being Rich.* I had assumed, like most Americans, that foreign travel involved expensive transport, luxury hotels, and three-star restaurants. Travel was something you did when you were old and wealthy.

Not so, explained Ford patiently. Everybody in the world travels, often at extremely low cost. Europeans tour Europe, Arabs criss-cross the Middle East, Indians roam about India. They take trains and buses, freighters and charter flights. They stay in "native" hotels and eat at the indigenous equivalent of Denny's. There is a great, thriving infrastructure dedicated to serving local tourists who have limited funds. Traveling this way you can cross Asia, from Singapore to Istanbul, for less than $300. Granted you will get into some grubby situations; but you will survive without damage and will see life in the lands you visit in a way that Hilton-to-Hilton travelers never do.

So as soon as I had a breathing space in my life, I went around the world on $2,000. I did India by train, the Middle East by bus, and Europe by motor scooter. The travel bug entered my system and never left. Eventually I went around the world four times, backpacked Africa, hitch-hiked Australia, and lived for a year in Provence.

One major trip took place just before I launched *The Ecphorizer,* and another while it was being published. It was natural for me to record some of the high points of these experiences. Later I added a few accounts of earlier travel, reconstructed from my notebooks. Here they all are, as they originally appeared in the magazine. ❖

Trapped in the Mummy's Tomb

Every time I begin to tell this story, it unfolds into a series of flashbacks. Each detail seems to require a prior explanation. I considered the standard beginning "I was born...," but perhaps that goes back too far. Let's start out and see what happens. By the way, every word of this story is true.

So it happened that Tex and I were deep underground, exploring the ancient Egyptian tomb of Thothmes III, when suddenly our lights failed. Standing there alone in utter blackness, we realized that we had no idea which of the many labyrinthine corridors led back to the surface, and...

No, that's not the right way to start.

You see, it was 1961. I was out of college, and had managed to scrape together $2000 to travel around the world. In the event, I managed to stretch it out for eleven months and 32 countries. From San Francisco, I took a series of cheap boats to Yokohama, Hong Kong, Manila, and Saigon. I may well have been one of the last Americans to cross Indochina peacefully by bus. After visiting Angkor Wat and spending a week in Rangoon, I threw myself on the Pako-lndian train system, visiting Darjeeling and Kathmandu as well as the Ganges valley. A German, a New Zealander and I then bribed our way across Khyber and made it down to Quetta just in time to catch the once-a-week train across Baluchistan into southern Iran.

There I mucked about interminably on local transport until Baghdad, where I found a broken-down bus that followed a pipeline for two days across the western desert to Amman. Part of the Hejaz railway had been restored after T. E. Lawrence's handiwork, so I took it down to Ma'an and visited Petra, "the rose-red city half as old as Time." It was there (we're beginning to get to the point) that I fell in with a Canadian who told me

that when I got to Cairo I should on no account miss staying at "the German pension." He even drew me a little map.

So I spent a week in Cairo at a pension run by two German nuns. Its most memorable feature was that they had discovered how to create entire dinners out of nothing but potatoes: potato soup, potato salad, a main course of potatoes *au gratin,* and potato pudding for dessert. But I digress. I had originally hoped to stay at the famous Floating Youth Hostel—Farouk's yacht which had been seized during the revolution, tied up at the foot of Kasr el Nil street, and converted into dormitories. But this was not to be, and a Britisher at the pension told me why. It was a typical Egypt story. An electrician had been hired to install lights; he was drilling down from deck to deck until Surprise! the Nile! Instead of disturbing anyone, however, he quietly packed his tools and went home. The next morning at six, an Egyptian appeared in the dormitory and announced, solemnly, "The Hostel is going down." Sure enough—there was water sloshing in the stairwells, and just after everyone had scrambled to the dock the boat quietly sank.

Anyway, the nuns' place had become a new crossroads for travel bums like myself. It was located in Faggala, one of the worst slums. Years later I met a woman at a party who had lived in Cairo and said to her, brightly, "Oh, I stayed there, in Faggala." She avoided me the rest of the evening. But it was at the pension that I met Tex, a six-foot-two American who, like I, was planning to go upriver to Luxor. We were anxious to eat something besides potatoes, so we left by train the next evening.

In India I had become accustomed to traveling third class. At night I would lay my sleeping bag out on the broad luggage rack and snooze happily above the tumult and the animals. Tex had been traveling in better style, but when I promised him a unique experience he readily agreed to go along. He was not disappointed, for about two am some seedy-looking ruffians came running through the carriage, followed by police firing pistols into the roof. It turned out they had been smuggling rifle bullets concealed in bags of salt. To fully appreciate the scene,

however, you must experience the sound of a .44 magnum going off in a closed railway car. Tex just couldn't thank me enough for broadening his horizons.

Believe it or not, we're getting there. Once in Luxor, Tex and I immediately headed for the Valley of Kings. The normal route is to cross the river by ferry and then, at the landing-stage, take a tourist bus about five miles to the tombs. But this involves bus tickets and entry fees, a luxury we felt able to forgo. Looking at the map, we discerned a shorter route, following a mule track over the hill behind Queen Hatshepsut's temple. It was not only more direct but avoided the bother of encountering the ticket-taker at the entrance to the Valley. So we set out by foot, and after tarrying at various monuments along the way arrived in the afternoon at the royal tombs. It was nicely timed because the last tourist bus had left and we were, at that moment, the only visitors in the Valley. Of course the officials did not know we were there; but in our ticketless status we did not feel it necessary to arouse them.

The tomb of Thothmes III is the deepest and most intricate in the Valley. It begins with a long staircase at ground level, which descends through a (modern) steel door into a labyrinth of false passages. In a further attempt to confuse robbers, the original builders had dug an enormous pit, which one crosses today on a swaying catwalk. The final chambers are some 400 feet below ground. At the time we were there, all this was illuminated by a string of electric bulbs powered by a gasoline-driven generator.

So Tex and I tripped gaily down the passages, following the dimly glowing bulbs to the innermost room, the royal sarcophagus chamber. We were examining the frescoes there when the lights flickered, dimmed, and went out.

Later we realized that the Egyptians, thinking their last customer gone, had simply shut down the generator and were preparing to go home for the day. But at a moment like that, one abandons prosaic explanations. We tried frantically to recall if the guidebook had mentioned any curses connected with this particular tomb. We held our breaths, listening for the rumble of

a sarcophagus cover sliding off. Do you smell balsam, like a mummy wrapping being unwound? I imagined what I would do when the bony hand fell on my shoulder. Pass out, most likely.

After a while, our wits cleared and we contemplated getting out of there. Of course we had no matches or flashlights, and retained only the faintest recollection of which branches and turnings we had taken on the way in. Finally, we edged along the wall of the tomb chamber until we reached an opening. We felt our way down the stone passages, shouting into each one to determine which were short and which were long. We crossed the catwalk on hands and knees, feeling rather than seeing the chasm below. From time to time we were able to reach up to a bulb on the ceiling, reassuring us that we were on the track. After forty minutes of this, we saw a faint glow coming down the long staircase to the surface.

We arrived at the steel door just as the guard was coming to lock it for the night. He laughed his ass off. He didn't even think to ask us about tickets. I'm sure he enlivened his entire village with our story that night.

Tex and I traveled together as far as Aswan. After that day, however, he insisted that we buy tickets for all the antiquities. A few years later I went to his wedding in Carmel. He must have told his bride about our experiences, because she made it clear that if they ever went to Egypt together, they would take a guided tour. Poo! Where can you find a guided tour that offers you the option of becoming Trapped in the Mummy's Tomb?

Sudan Diary

Note: In 1981, I spent January to June traveling around the world westward with Martha Johnson. The following article was mailed to the San Francisco Mensa *Intelligencer* from Egypt, but was not printed at the time because of space limitations. ❖

During our recent travels, we have tended to keep two kinds of records. I have maintained the more prosaic log of events and finances, while Martha has written an impressionistic diary of our experiences. Here are some excerpts from both, covering the journey northward from Khartoum. Prices are in Sudanese pounds, which cost $1.05 in "unofficial" transactions.

Tuesday 3/17—Khartoum

Log: Preparations for travel tomorrow. Transaction in *souk*: Changed $60 cash for 57 Sudanese pounds at a jewelry stall. Bought 12 oranges, 6 tomatoes, half-kilo dates, bag of shelled peanuts, total 4.70. Two plastic jerrycans for water, 3.00. Train tickets to Wadi Halfa 18.20 each, plus 32.60 for 2-bed private compartment.

Diary: George went to the train station ticket window at 7:30 am. He was told Wednesday was sold out and we would have to get the Sunday train. (There are two trains a week.) Relieved of the need to rush about madly, we went to the market (*souk*) and bought water containers. As I walked back to the Oasis Hotel (expensive, but aptly named—they have Pepsi and glasses of ice!), George went to the train station and bought our tickets. This time they said Sunday was full, Wednesday was not, so we had to leave the next day after all. How typically Sudanese. At 5:00 pm when the worst of the heat was past, we walked back to the *souk* and bought food for the trip. We also picked up mail at the Post Office. I got a letter!

Wednesday 3/18—Khartoum to Abu Hamed (560 km.)

Log: Train scheduled to leave at 6:30 am; actually left at 8:15. Consists of 17 wooden carriages; first class has padded seats. Compartment has folding wash basin which ultimately runs out of water. Route along Nile past archaeological site of Meroë, with stops at Shendi, Atbara and Berber. No evidence of former slave markets. Expenses: Taxi to station, 1.00. Tip to man who found taxi at 6:00 am, .25. Mutton-rice lunches on train, 2.20. Bread and tea at stations, .70.

Diary: The train was a nice one. Outside, the scene was desert with low, dry-looking brush. At the stations food vendors wandered by, as well as goats, who munched any debris tossed out the window. We met a delightful retired Canadian named Doug in the next compartment and were befriended by a big, outgoing Sudani. Saad is married to a German woman and they live in Germany. He was traveling on business and helped us greatly. We learned to order tea without sugar—*chai bedoon sukrah.* Sometimes we wished we could order *chai bedoon chai,* it was so strong.

Thursday 3/19—Abu Hamed to Wadi Halfa (370 km.)

Log: Train route leaves the Nile, cutting across the Nubian Desert. Landscape looks like the moon. When we open the windows we get choked by dust; when we close them we fry. Choking seems preferable. At 5:00 pm the Nile reappears and we steam into Wadi Halfa. Scramble for beds at the "Nile Hotel." Martha is spared the horrors of the women's quarters. One-hour lineup for cold-water shower. Clean again! Expenses: train breakfasts (nearly inedible), 2.00. Tea and misc., 1.00. Donkey cart from station to "hotel," .65. Two beds, 2.20. Delicious local fried fish, 1.00.

Diary: During the night, the scene changed to flat, flat land with no vegetation, only an occasional rock. All our stops were at stations with no names, just numbers. When we arrived at Wadi Halfa, we couldn't get on the boat because Customs was closed. Saad took charge and booked us all into one room at the Nile

Hotel, the only "hotel" in town. For dinner we had some very tasty and delicately fried fish wrapped in Arabic newspaper (purchased by Saad). I ate lightly as I didn't want to use the outhouse-type toilets any more than necessary.

Friday 3/20—Wadi Halfa to Abu Simbel (42 mi.)

Log: Spent morning clearing Sudanese Customs. The *S.S. Ashorah Ramadan,* a 400-ton flat-bottomed river boat, left at 2:00 pm. Our first class cabin is at deck level; second class is above, under the cabin roof, and third class is in the hold. An additional third class barge is lashed to the starboard side. Luckily, our cabin is on the port side. Nice views of the Nile and a chance to do some laundry. Boat tied up at nightfall just above Abu Simbel. Expenses: two tickets to Sadd El-Ali with two-berth cabin, 10.40 each. Land Rover from "hotel" to jetty, 2.00. More fried fish, boat food, tea, etc., 3.70 total.

Diary: Arising early, we packed up and rushed over to the boat ticket window and Passport Control. Saad was a great help again, as the few signs were in Arabic. Passport Control had a separate window for nonSudanese. This category included many Egyptians so it had what I call an Indian-style queue, where everyone jams around the window and pushes madly. This bothered Doug and me more than it did George, but eventually we learned to defend our position with our elbows and got our passports stamped for exit. The boat was nice except for the toilet (common "facilities"). Showers had only cold water, but it was so-o-o good to be clean again. I had not "showered" at the "hotel" the night before.

Saturday 3/21—Abu Simbel to near Sadd El-Ali (175 mi.)

Log: A pleasant day chugging down Lake Nasser, tying up at nightfall a few miles above the High Dam. Captain gives rocks a good bash when tying up; hope they don't let him near the dam itself. Egyptian immigration formalities on boat—usual madhouse. Expenses: Boat food to supplement last of provisions, 4.20.

Diary: The boat started up at 12:15 am. Why did it stop last night? We came up with different theories. Saad said it stopped to get bread. George thought the captain wanted a good dinner and/or a romp with his girl friend. Anyway, we roused up in time to view the temple at Abu Simbel, which was dimly visible by the light of the full moon. Then it was back to bed for a good night's sleep. In the morning Doug returned to his cabin after breakfast and found his Sudanese cabin-mate had invited six friends into the small room. They were playing cards on his bed, eating food and throwing orange peels and other debris on the floor. Mild-mannered, courteous Doug went into a towering rage and threw them all out. Things got quite exciting with much yelling as the Sudanese argued and explained in Arabic.

Sunday 3/22 Sadd El-Ali to Aswan (19 km.)

Log: Morning spent on Egyptian health inspections, including fumigating the boat with everybody on board. Lunch at jetty: fish-rice and real Seven-Up! First train not until 4:00 pm, so shared a taxi into Aswan. Back to civilization, somewhat. Expenses: Lunches, 300 Egyptian piasters; taxi seats, 200. Heavy bargaining here, requiring much "piaster resistance."

Diary: We arrived at the dam this morning. It took forever to get everyone cleared through the one health officer, but we finally got off the boat. Saad got us all fed and then we taxied to town. Saad took the train to Cairo and Doug, George and I went to a hotel in Aswan. Beautiful view, dirty room, clean bed. Altogether this trip has been one of the most delightful parts of our travels. The scene itself was interesting all along and it had the added ingredient of truly congenial traveling companions.

Postscript (written two years later)

In the pre-dawn hours of May 25, 1983, the *S.S. Ashorah Ramadan* exploded and sank in deep water not far from Abu Simbel. Of the 599 passengers and 28 crew, 325 managed to save themselves; 302 perished by drowning or crocodile attacks. The passenger list included 547 Sudanese, 48 Egyptians, 1 Tanzanian, 1 Chadian, 1 Frenchman and 1 New Zealander.

It makes you think. The *Ashorah Ramadan* carried no life boats; if it had, they would have been impossible to launch through the barge full of third-class passengers that was lashed to its side. There was no emergency drill, and I do not recall any mention of life jackets. The fire-fighting equipment, if any, was invisible. The crew ran the boat and Allah took care of the passengers.

In terms of our world, such a situation is intolerable. But in the Sudan it made a sort of sense. By packing the maximum number of people into the cheapest possible boat, they made transportation affordable. Our first class cabin berths cost about eleven dollars each; the barge passengers (who also had the best chance to escape) paid about two dollars. If they had built the boat to our standards, half of the passengers would have been unable to travel; they would have either stayed in their villages or found an even more dangerous way to go.

How much did these lives cost? One can estimate that during its ten year life the *Ashorah Ramadan* carried some half a million passengers. Of these, 302 died. If the proprietors had done it "right," the third class ticket price might have been $40 instead of $2; each life saved would thus have cost about $60,000. The Sudan doesn't have that kind of money to spend.

Would I travel that way again? One chance in 1655 of getting killed may seem like short odds, but you probably do no worse driving across the U.S. There is some value in going along with the majority—and if Allah decides to sink my boat, who am I to argue?

Tripping Africa

Note: In the summer of 1983, I turned the editorship of *The Ecphorizer* over to my longtime friend, John Cumming. In January, 1984, he published this letter from me. ❖

What ever happens to ex-editors, anyway? This particular one is going to disappear into the jungle—the African jungle, that is, and I hope not permanently. On January 10, Christine Palmer-Persen and I wing off for London and Capetown, the starting point for a land trek from the southernmost point to the northernmost point of the continent.

The southernmost point is a place called Cape Agulhas, about 60 miles southeast of Capetown. With any luck there will be a sign or plaque or something, in English and Afrikaans, that we can pose beside for the camera, all fresh and innocent. The northernmost point is Cap Blanc, not far from Tunis. There we hope to find another sign or plaque, this time probably in French, toward which we can drag our tattered and grubby bodies for another picture.

In between, our route crosses the Zambezi, Congo and Niger rivers, skirts the Kalahari desert but stabs smack across the Sahara, and plunges through steamy equatorial Africa between the end of the Indian Ocean's summer and the beginning of spring on the Mediterranean. It carries us through South Africa, Ciskei, Transkei, Swaziland, Botswana, Zimbabwe (sticking close to the train), Zambia, Zaire, Congo, Gabon (if the road hasn't turned to mud), Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Mali if we have time, Niger, Algeria, and Tunisia.

At least, that's the plan. If the good folks we are visiting start killing each other in large enough quantities that the odd bullet hits a tourist, we will head for the nearest airport. The itinerary

still has a few blank spots in it, which we will fill in as we go along. Like, what do you do when Zaire Railways deposits you in Ilebo, on the Kasai river, and the weekly steamer is beached for repairs? But most of it involves regular public transport which people of all colors have been taking for years.

We will not forget *The Ecphorizer.* Runners will be dispatched regularly to the coast with articles for publication. We have even drawn a bead on a few isolated Mensa members to visit along the way. Who knows? Maybe we can peddle a few subscriptions. It will be instructive to discover how many hippopotamus tails we can get for a year's worth of the magazine...

Epilog: The trip went fairly close to plan. We found a sign at the southernmost point of Africa and took a picture. The exact northernmost point was off limits, on a Tunisian military base, but we got as close as we could and took another picture.

In between, we spent 100 days covering the continent by car, bus, train, bush taxi, and truck. Gabon was impassable so we flew over it; we also took a close look at the train in Zaire and flew over that. We didn't make it to Mali. But otherwise we stayed on the ground and covered the route we had plotted. The resulting articles are reproduced in the following pages. ❖

The Zambia Cannonball

6:00 am. The travel alarm goes off. We have been sleeping in a *rondavel,* an African-style round hut with thatched roof, on the north bank of the Zambezi near Victoria Falls. Although one of the mosquito nets was full of holes, it has been a peaceful night. Now we wash quickly, jug-and-basin style, and do up our backpacks. We don't want to miss the train to Lusaka, which leaves Livingstone at 8:00 am.

6:45 am. We hike down the road to the government-owned Rainbow Hotel, where the kitchen is just coming awake. They serve us toast, tea and fresh pineapple juice.

7:30 am. We had made arrangements with a taxi driver the night before to take us 5 km to the Livingstone station. He picks us up by the side of the road. An unexplained additional passenger sits quietly with us during the trip.

7:45 am. Two "standard class" tickets to Lusaka cost 14 kwacha (about $8) each. We buy them and hurry to the train.

8:00 am. There is a train standing at the platform but we are told to wait. Porters are throwing chairs and food out the windows of the dining car. Soon the train backs out of the station, going away from Lusaka. People are beginning to gather in the station.

8:30 am. More people are arriving, evidently old hands who know about 8 o'clock departure times. Much shunting of cars from track to track. A porter arrives with a hand truck full of Coke and Fanta bottles.

9:00 am. At last a train chugs in and everybody gets aboard. The chairs that were thrown off earlier are handed in the windows of the new dining car, along with the Coke and Fanta. Apparently Zambia Railways owns but one set of dining car chairs.

9:15 am. We leave, amid much whistle blowing and flag waving. We chug through the lush landscape past villages of thatched huts, each with its patch of corn and vegetables.

11:00 am. The train has been bouncing violently on the track, so that we are nearly thrown from our seats. We stop at a place called Kabuyu. Cows graze along the track. Little boys come and stare at us. We are the only whites on the train. We smile and wave.

Noon. Still at Kabuyu. We take some pictures of the boys, the cows and the village.

1:00 pm. Still at Kabuyu. Local opinions differ. Some say the engine has broken down; others blame the brakes. We go to the dining car and have two lunches of beef-rice and tea with milk—total 7 kwachas. The beef is like leather. They must prepare it from cows that were hit by the train. But the rice is tasty.

3:00 pm. Still at Kabuyu. A Land Rover arrives, filled with railway officials. They climb into the engine. We hear the brakes being clamped and released several times.

3:15 pm. The officials leave and the train starts up again, still bouncing violently. We are now more than five hours behind schedule. We hurtle past more cows, boys, and villages.

5:30 pm. Choma, our first big stop. We are besieged by food sellers carrying baskets of corn-on-the-cob on their heads. The corn is delicious, and a bargain at 40 ngwee. Three young ladies, dolled up to the point of questionable virtue, plop themselves in the seats opposite us. One of them goes down to the dining car and brings back bottles of Fanta. Another calmly uncaps them with her teeth. Watch out for that one. According to the schedule, we should have arrived in Lusaka by now; instead, we are not yet halfway there.

8:00 pm. The sun has set and the train has filled to overflowing. The extra people help keep it on the track, but occasionally everyone is thrown into a heap nevertheless. We are still the only whites aboard. We have been warned not to walk about Lusaka

after dark, and wonder what we'll do when we arrive. The lady with the bottle-opener teeth offers to escort us to a taxi.

11:30 pm. Lusaka station. An incredible scene of shoving, shouting, African humanity. We feel like two plump chickens in a building full of foxes. We grab our packs and run for the taxis.

1:30 am. It turns out that there is an international conference in town. All the regular hotels are either full or have locked their doors for the night. After much searching, we finally secure a room in a bordello. But that's another story.

Postscript: Part of the story is that I tried to stamp on a cockroach, slipped on the carpet, and twisted my ankle. After a few days of ice and Ace bandages it felt OK. Eight years later, when my foot was X-rayed for another reason, it was discovered that the bone had fractured and knitted. Fortunately no medical advice was handy at the time, or I might have finished backpacking Africa in a leg cast. ❖

An International Incident

Christine and I arrived late Monday evening in Kinshasa, much bedraggled after a week in upcountry Zaire. Our plan was to take the ferry boat northward across Stanley Pool to Brazzaville, then fly on to Douala. It seemed a simple and elegant way to see the lower Congo, particularly since several guide books had assured us that the authorities in Brazzaville would grant us a transit visa when we stepped off the boat.

By Tuesday afternoon, we had purchased our plane tickets for the weekly flight from Brazzaville that left Thursday morning at 9. It was then that we discovered, to our dismay, that Brazzaville visas had to be procured in advance and in fact involved an unusually complicated process.

An historical note is in order here. When the former French colony north of the Congo River gained its independence in 1960, it immediately became a Marxist-Leninist "people's democracy," much like Cuba. Despite several coups and upheavals, the Brazzaville government has remained virginally communist, to the great annoyance of Zaire and its other neighbors.

And its relations with the U.S. Government have been none too good, either. In fact, one of their visa requirements for Americans was that we procure a letter from our consulate, asking them to let us into the people's paradise.

So we hied ourselves to the American Consulate, located at the foot of Kinshasa's main boulevard, and got our letters. They attested, in French, that we were indeed American citizens, and any courtesies shown us would evoke Uncle Sam's undying gratitude. Little did Uncle Sam know...

Thus it was that bright and early Wednesday morning we were knocking on the door of the Congolese embassy in Kinshasa,

asking to have visas stamped in our passports. We were taken up by a pleasant and efficient consular officer, who looked at our plane tickets for the next morning and assured us that a visa could be issued that day. Letters from our consulate, check. Three photographs, check. Vaccination certificates, check. Three forms filled out, check. 600 zaires (about $20), check. He assembled everything into a bundle, with our passports and plane tickets, and told us to come back at noon.

We returned to the Congolese embassy at 11:30 and sat in their waiting room. The consul—not the person we had met earlier but a tall, severe-looking man named Okembi—reigned in his office. Our papers were carried in and out of his presence several times. He had a few visitors, mainly young ladies. We waited. Chickens scratched around the front door. His secretary entered his office once without knocking and was made to back out and do it properly. We waited some more. One o'clock. One-thirty.

At two o'clock Okembi suddenly burst out of his office, shouting and waving his hands in the air. "No, more today," he declared, "I'm going home." He locked his office and headed out the door.

We were horrified. In Zaire, your papers are everything. Without a passport we couldn't change money or check back into our hotel. If the police stopped us, our paperless state might land us in jail. Without our plane tickets we couldn't change flights. We followed Okembi to his car, pleading with him to at least give us back our stuff. He shouted in incomprehensible French and waved his arms some more. He climbed into his car, accompanied by a couple of his ladies. As I pleaded with him through the window, the car started to roll.

At this point the International Incident took place. Christine planted herself in front of the consular car, hoping to give me a little more time to assemble the French irregular verbs that I was hurling through the window. Okembi choked with rage. He ordered the chauffeur to run over Christine. The chauffeur tried to hide under the dashboard. In desperation, I launched into pluperfect subjunctives. The ladies in the back seat gaggled with alarm.

Soon it became clear that Christine was no match for a ton of motorized steel. She stepped aside, the car roared away, and we were unceremoniously ejected from the Congolese Embassy.

The next 24 hours were a nightmare of picking up pieces and cajoling various suspicious Africans into accepting our *bona fides*. The American consulate was sympathetic and offered to help get our passports back. By the next afternoon we had developed a new travel plan, via Sabou, and felt confident enough of the future to treat ourselves to a swim in the pool at the Intercontinental Hotel.

Christine was on her 85th lap and I had just finished a beer when an American Embassy chauffeur appeared at poolside. Begging our pardon, but the American consul would be most appreciative if we could have a chat downtown. No hurry—any time in the next 30 minutes would do.

The American consul, a thoroughly professional diplomat named Sally Beth Bunbrey, received us in her office. A bit of a problem had developed at the governmental level. As a matter of fact, Okembi was refusing to issue any more visas to Americans. Although consuls don't usually have that authority, he was a nephew of the President of the Congo and pretty much did what he felt like. Several aid programs were suddenly disrupted because Americans were unable to cross the river. The Ambassador was not officially asking us, but just wondered if we had considered going back to the Congolese Embassy and apologizing to Okembi...

We mulled over this suggestion. I still had some French past participles I hadn't tried on him. Finally, the next morning, we trudged out to the Congolese Embassy like good little citizens.

After a half hour in the old familiar waiting room, we were led into the presence. Okembi sat in stony silence as I parsed my apologies.

Then he launched into a 20-minute tirade. His honor had been abridged. His progress home had been impeded. His lunch had been delayed. He was a man of dignity, a man of the world.

Why, he had even been in Paris! Who did we think we were, etc. It was a nostalgic moment for me; I had not been spoken to that way since leaving the Army. Finally he waxed magnanimous. Recognizing our frailties, our insignificance, he had decided to open the border once more to Americans. Peace was declared. We were ushered out.

Later, at the hotel, we ran into a very worried American professor. His project to rescue the pigmy chimpanzee from extinction had been stymied by the visa ban. We were able to assure him that all was now well. War between the United States of America and the People's Republic of the Congo had been averted, and the honor of Mr. Okembi had been restored.

Nigerian Notebook

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. Home of Hausas, lbos and Yorubas, as different from one another as Germans from Frenchmen. Blessed with oil but slowly sinking in foreign debts. A landscape ranging from steamy jungle in the south to parched desert in the north.

The revolution in January gave Nigerians new hopes. The soldiers who took over are on their best behavior, and everybody is trying to prove that the country is not just another banana dictatorship. This honeymoon period is the best possible time for travelers.

Christine and I enter Nigeria in the north, crossing from the Cameroon highlands just south of Lake Chad. Although smuggling has been officially abolished there is an enormous market just inside the border, filled with Cameroon goods. The prevailing medium-class transport in this part of Africa consists of 6-passenger Peugeot station wagons. Elsewhere, the village car park has been a scene of chaos, as each driver tries to drag you into his vehicle. Here, all is orderly. On top of one car is a wooden box, with the destination and price painted on it. When that car is filled, the box is placed on top of another. Within five minutes we are bouncing over the potholes to Maiduguri.

Nigerian money comes in *nairas,* each containing 100 *kobos.* At the bank a *naira* costs $1.33. But in the market, $100 cash buys from 200 to 250 *nairas,* depending on how hard you bargain. This useful situation is partly a consequence of the revolution. Every day the papers are full of stories about how officials of the former government have been caught trying to convert their ill-gotten nairas into foreign bank balances. However, it also means that imported goodies, which must be bought with hard currencies, are quickly disappearing from the markets.

The train to Bauchi carries an ancient wooden sleeping car which is falling apart beyond redemption. The chain that is supposed to support the outer corner of the upper berth has come loose; when I climb up there the whole assembly groans and sags, threatening to deposit me on the floor. I extract a loose screw from elsewhere in the car. Using the gimlet on my Swiss army knife, I install the screw in the corner of the berth and rig it to the end of the chain. It works; I get a good night's sleep.

The Jos plateau is dry, dry, dry. The harmattan blows down from the Sahara, sucking the water out of you. We are staying with Mensan Waclaw Kijewski and his wife, Anna. They are from Poland; he teaches English and physics at the University of Jos. Anna boils and filters big pots of water, which we greedily guzzle down. They make their own Polish sausages and preserves. We eat well for a change. They have a papaya tree; we raid it every morning for breakfast.

The Canadian community in Jos is putting on a pageant—songs, skits, and a film about Canada. The show is nearly cancelled when a mob of Islamic fanatics comes out of the hills and threatens Jos; the police are talking about roadblocks and a curfew. But all quiets down and we go. The film shows steel mills, electronic gadgetry, endless fields of grain. The audience is ho-hum about it all. But then a single image throws the hall into pandemonium. It shows a farmer unloading a bushel basket of apples. In Nigeria, apples are the ultimate foreign delicacy, available only rarely and at great cost. Surely a country where they are handled by the basketful must be rich beyond imagining!

There are still primitive people in Nigeria. Waclaw wants to take us to a village he visited some years ago, where the women wear wooden buttons in their lips. He inquires first at the University and is told that the village no longer exists. Two years ago a camera crew visited them; the result appeared on national television under the title "The Shame of Nigeria." Shortly thereafter the government sent trucks and dispersed the villagers

into other areas. Now there are only two old ladies left, who grimly refuse to be photographed.

Jos has a Chinese restaurant; the food is good, even though they have never heard of fortune cookies. We go there and listen to Nigeria stories. A law professor from the University tells about the Great Cement Scandal. A few years ago, when oil dollars were plentiful, certain government employees discovered they could get generous kickbacks by purchasing cement. Everybody jumped into the act, and a large part of the world's supply suddenly headed for Nigeria. At one point there were 900 ships sitting in Lagos harbor, waiting to unload cement. With no way to store it or use it, the government finally threw up their hands; they told the ships to dump their cargos and go home. All that cement dropped to the bottom of Lagos harbor, where the tides smoothed it out. A diver went down and reported that there was nothing else like it on this planet—a perfect concrete bottom for miles in every direction, like a monstrous swimming pool.

Kano is 200 miles north of Jos, on the edge of the Sahel. The Emir of Kano still holds court there in a walled compound with his hundreds of wives and thousands of children. As we are peering into the gateway, he suddenly leaves for an appointment. First an aged retainer in a blue robe comes bounding out, blowing an antique horn. He is followed by a brightly painted minibus full of women, with THE EMIR OF KANO written on its side. Enough wives to hold him for an afternoon, presumably. Then the man himself in a black limousine, giving a clenched fist salute to the guards. The whole entourage disappears in a cloud of dust.

The Magwan Water Restaurant is the only public swimming pool in Kano. The British left Nigeria some odd nomenclature; sidewalk restaurants, for example, are called "food hotels." They specialize in such items as pounded yams and pepper soup. The water restaurant also serves lunch. We order enormous dumplings with a spicy sauce and lumps of tough meat. Cow? Goat? Better not ask.

The Lagos Express carries us from the desiccated plains of Kano to the lush coastal swamps in 28 hours. We leave it short of Lagos and head west. This time we have a relatively modern sleeping car and a couple of Agatha Christies to enjoy in it. When we order tea, the dining car steward regretfully informs us that none is available. I produce a tea bag from my rucksack and life goes forward.

At the Benin border, as we leave Nigeria, we pass another market full of smuggled goods. The state of our Foreign Exchange Control Form represents a small worry; after 12 days crossing Nigeria I can show only $60 changed into *naira* at the official rate. But the guards magnanimously wave us through. Their revolution has been accomplished, the military is in control, and the New Nigeria is about to unfold.

Trucking the Sahara

Agadez, in northern Niger, is connected by bus service along paved roads to Niamey and Kano, and thence to all of tropical Africa. Similarly, Tamanrasset in southern Algeria is connected to Algiers, Tunis, and Tangier, and thence to all the Mediterranean coast of Europe.

Between Agadez and Tamanrasset, however, lies a thousand kilometers of roadless desert, including some of the most forbidding landscape on this planet. Wells are infrequent, villages nonexistent. There is a track of sorts across this wasteland, marked principally by the stripped skeletons of vehicles that have died along the way. This is the route that Christine and I took in late March [1984], traveling from West Africa to the Mediterranean.

There is no public transport between Agadez and Tam. Adventurous Europeans make the trip in four-wheel-drive vehicles loaded to the roof with spare tires and cans of water and fuel. Backpackers like us are left with the only alternative: we buy seats in one of the half-dozen or so trucks that make the journey each day. Here is our diary of this trip. In my experience, it is one of the last great travel adventures around.

Tuesday. We arrive in Agadez early in the morning after an all-night bus trip from Niamey. It is a city built entirely of mud, including the hotel. We have been given a name to contact—Mr Mano Dayak, a general knower of people and arranger of things. We find his hangout near the market and are delighted to discover that he speaks some English. He sends his man out to search for a suitable ride.

We are scarcely settled in the hotel when we get results! Hamed, a Tuareg driver, has just unloaded a cargo of Algerian dates and is ready to return empty to Tam. I inspect his truck. It is a ten-ton Berliet with an open box, quite well maintained. The tires are all

good. We negotiate in English and Arabic through Mr Dayak. The going rate for the three-day trip, including food and water, is 20,000 African francs ($50) each for seats in the cab. But having experienced Africans' predilection for inviting all their friends and relations to join them, we insist that at no time shall the cab be occupied by more than Hamed, Christine, and me. This includes animals. More negotiations. We finally agree to pay an additional 10,000 francs and Hamed agrees to disappoint the six cousins he was planning to invite to share our seats. We shake hands. Hamed proposes to leave at six this very evening, *insh'Allah.*

Although the deal includes food, we scour the market and lay by some emergency supplies—tins of sardines, canned fruit juice, concentrated milk, etc. We also top off our *bidons,* our plastic jerrycans of water. We arrange our packs so that sleeping bags and flashlights are on top. We go to the police station and get our passports cleared for the trip.

We assemble at the truck at six. No Hamed. His friend says he is at the police station. Nobody knows what is happening, a condition I have come to name "African mush." Finally it appears that the police won't let Hamed start so late. All is rescheduled for the next morning. We return to the hotel, just in time to have dinner up on the roof. We eat heartily and sleep soundly.

Wednesday. Up early and back to the truck. Preparations are well advanced. Bulging water skins, looking very hairy, are slung under the frame. A hindquarter of goat hangs behind the cab. In the back are bedrolls and firewood. Two black helpers will ride in the back: Abdul is from Niger, Turay is from Mali. They are both Hausa and speak some French.

At nine we finally roll. Here we get our first lesson in Tuareg etiquette. Christine sits in the middle, so when I hand Hamed the money she passes it on, using her right hand. Hamed indicates that she is to place it on the seat. A minute later he picks it up and pockets it. Taureg men never accept money from women.

Thirty-five kilometers out of Agadez the paved road curves right, toward the uranium mines at Arlit. We leave it and head across the desert north by west. We will not see tarmac again for 900 kilometers.

The landscape is still fairly friendly, with a few trees and dry scrub. The track is identified by a maze of tire marks across the sand. Our Michelin map shows four water holes between us and the Algerian border, 450 kilometers ahead. The first is marked *puits artésien bonne*; here we stop for lunch. Sure enough, the water bubbles under its own pressure into a trench in the ground, creating a patch of green in the desert. The first part of the trench has been excavated into a bathing hole for people; the next part is a shallow trough for camels to drink from; the last part empties into a kind of marsh for the goats. While we rest, trains of camels plod in from all directions. They drink and make disgusting noises while their drivers gossip.

While Hamed takes a bath, Abdul and Turay prepare lunch. It is *ragout de chèvre aux pâtes*—goat stew with macaroni shells. Into the pot go onions, tomatoes, potatoes, oil, salt, peppers, and pieces of goat. Everything boils for twenty minutes over the wood fire and then the macaroni is added. We sit on a straw mat, the pot in the center, each of us with a spoon. But first Abdul picks out the pieces of goat and sets them aside; as we reach the bottom he judiciously throws them back in so everyone gets an equal share.

After lunch, Turay prepares tea. It is very strong and very sweet, served in 2-ounce glasses. The preparation ceremony involves much pouring from one container to another, raising the pot each time so the stream of tea arcs through the air. A certain amount of tea disappears into the sand, but it is fun to watch.

Meanwhile, Hamed has been off doing business with one of the camel caravans, He returns carrying a surveyor's telescope, for which he paid l0,000 francs. The fate of the surveyor to which it belonged is not mentioned. Hamed will sell it in Tamanrasset at a good profit, whence it will probably go to the market in Algiers.

We push onward. The desert is now rocky hardpan with a covering of sand. There are occasional stunted trees. Before we leave the trees altogether, we gather more firewood. Hamed runs over trees with the truck and Abdul and Turay toss them into the back. At the third water hole, Hamed meets some friends and buys a live goat. It too goes into the back.

At the last water hole, a place called In-Abangarit, there is a Tuareg encampment. Hamed acquires another goat, a young one, and hands it to Abdul. Abdul sharpens his best knife. The Tuareg children dance around with delight, making throat-cutting pantomimes. Abdul kneels over the goat. There is a last gurgling bleat, and blood spurts into the sand. Half an hour later the carcass is dressed and hanging on the truck.

At In-Abangarit we stop for dinner. The menu features goat stew again, but this time instead of macaroni it is served with fresh bread. While the stew is cooking, Abdul kneads a large flat loaf of salt bread and bakes it in hot ashes from the fire. It is delicious.

Here we learn more about Tuareg etiquette. It appears that we are below the salt, if not below the stairs. While Hamed is being entertained in camp, we dine with the servants. Hamed spends considerable time in the women's tent. Maybe he is courting? Anyway, it is plain that he finds our presence in his truck slightly embarrassing.

Hamed returns to the truck late and we all turn in, spreading our bags in the sand on the downwind side. The goat in the back is brought down and tethered, where it bleats all night. Maybe it is reminiscing about its late brother. Well, it's a goat's life.

Thursday. Up at dawn, to breakfast on fresh tea and bread left over from last night. As we leave the Tuareg camp, Hamed acquires two more goats.

The map shows 275 kilometers of complete nothing between us and the border. Actually, we see several varieties of nothing. Sometimes we cross an utterly flat, featureless hardpan; other times we drive through fields of black volcanic rock. At one

point we pass a series of sand dunes. Most of the landscape is totally devoid of life.

I learn to wrap a *cheiche*—a desert head cloth—which covers everything but my eyes. Besides protecting my skin from the sun, it strains out dust and helps trap moisture from the breath. Christine covers her face with a towel and wears a hat she bought in Togo. We think we look strange, but the locals begin to treat us more normally.

Hamed fancies himself a Great Tuareg Pathfinder. Even where the track is well-defined he frequently leaves it and goes hot-dogging across the desert. We leave new tire marks where none existed before. When we get stuck in the sand, Abdul and Turay lay steel tracks under the tires and we crawl out.

Just before noon we see a cluster of trees on the horizon and soon pull into the Niger customs post at Assamakka. There are rows of cars with European plates parked there. Some have obviously sat there for months, presumably because their papers were not in order. Our documents are all OK, however, and we are soon headed north again.

Halfway to the Algerian customs post, a thorn tree materializes in the wilderness. We park beside it and have lunch. Surprise! Goat stew again! Christine and I walk a hundred yards or so to examine the bones of a camel laid out in the sand. That much exertion in the noon sun is quite enough—we spend the rest of lunch-time napping under the tree.

The Algerian customs post at In-Guezzam is the only man-made structure for the next 400 kilometers. It also has the only well and the only petrol. We top off the truck and refill our goatskins and *bidons.* The plan is to drive right through, hoping to make the police barrier on the outskirts of Tamanrasset by 2 a.m. Hamed regards it at "*trop dangereuse*" to sleep in the open desert. We clear customs at the same time as another truck and travel with them in convoy.

From here on the landscape is even bleaker than before. The sun beats down like a hammer. Nothing in its right mind would try to live here.

At dusk we pull the trucks together and make dinner. Guess what's on the menu! The two crews sit around the fire and talk shop. Although they converse in Arabic, they use enough foreign terms that we can follow the thread. It is all about border posts, and which officials can be bribed and for how much.

Later, we are dozing in the bouncing cab when we are awakened by the cry "Hey, touristes!" The two drivers are tired and have decided to stop for the night anyway. We park the trucks parallel behind some rocks and sleep between them. The stars are extraordinary—I have never seen so many before. The goats huddle together and remain silent all night.

Friday. During the morning we struggle up into the Hoggar mountains. The rock formations are weird and forbidding. Sixty kilometers from Tam we finally climb onto tarmac and finish the ride in relative comfort.

The truck is not allowed to go into town. So Hamed drops us off as close as he can get, which is about half a kilometer from the Tamanrasset tourist hotel. By this time, our normally compact backpacking equipment has degenerated into a pile of food bags, *bidons,* and miscellaneous packages. Three locals happen to be wandering by; after a bit of haggling we recruit them to help carry our stuff to the hotel.

Our entrance into the Hotel Tahat is magnificent. I am wearing my *cheiche* and a four-foot sword that I bought in Niamey. Christine is wearing her Togolese hat. Behind us winds a train of bearers with our baggage. We are dirty but triumphant. A French tour group which has been flown down from Algiers goggles at us in the lobby. They must have never seen real travelers before.

The Evil Empire

Note: I published this article in November, 1984, under the name "Buckley Fish." ❖

"Buckley Fish" is not my real name. The reason for the pseudonym is that I recently drove through Eastern Europe—East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary—and have some harsh opinions about the Russian hegemony there. I might like to go back some day and don't want to be denied entry—or, worse yet, be denied exit. So let them scan passports for the name of Buckley Fish; he's still out here, swimming in free water.

My friends and acquaintances know that in June of this year I rendezvoused with a Mensa friend and her mother in Paris. After a few days of eating and sightseeing we drove in my car to Berlin, Warsaw, Czestochowa, Krakow, Zakopane, Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, and finally Vienna. The mother, Ann, had been raised in Chicago by Slavic parents; she spoke flawless Bohemian and could communicate in Polish and several Czech languages. This opened up insights we could never have gained from bus tours or the parrot-like commentaries of government guides. Although we only scratched the surface of Eastern Europe, we got a good idea of what was going on underneath.

The first thing everyone said to Ann was how much they hated the Russians. This provided a bizarre counterpoint to the ubiquitous public monuments to "Russian-Czech Friendship" (or Russian-Polish, or Russian-Hungarian). People walked stolidly past these soulless stone piles (which were typically topped by a cast-iron Russian soldier supposed to be "liberating" them) but their thoughts were hardly friendly.

I got a taste of the status of Russians in Eastern Europe one day in Czestochowa, Poland. We were staying near the famous monastery of Jasna Gora, which houses the "Black Madonna" icon traditionally said to have been painted by Saint Luke. It is a

focus of pilgrimage for thousands of Poles every day, and one of the few places where they feel free to say what they think. Thus when I was standing out front, framing the building with my camera, a woman walked up and started racking me up and down in Polish.

Ann was not there to translate, so after a minute of verbal abuse I replied, politely, "I'm sorry, but I have no idea what you're saying." Pause. Consternation. "Russki?" she asked.

"Nie Russki," I cried, uncorking my Instant Slavic and pointing at myself, "Amerikanski!"

She fell all over herself with remorse. Suddenly nothing was too good for me. Perhaps I would prefer to take a picture from a better vantage point. Was there any way she could help me enjoy my visit in Poland? All this by tone and gesture, but the import was clear. Down with Russians, up with Americans.

Earlier this year, Reagan drew a lot of criticism by referring to the Russian role in Eastern Europe as an "evil empire." What a nasty thing to say, when we are trying so hard to get along with the Kremlin! But I now believe it is as descriptive a phrase as one can devise. The Russians are promoting their interests in their neighboring countries far more ruthlessly and insensitively than the nineteenth century colonial powers ever did in Asia and Africa. They are patently exploiting the Slavs—confining them to menial work, stealing the fruits of their labor, controlling their means of expression, and crushing them with tanks when they complain. And they are getting away with it.

It has been said that Russia is recapitulating British history a hundred years later. Thus they dropped the Iron Curtain over Eastern Europe about a hundred years after Queen Victoria proclaimed the British Empire. Their mastery of ICBM warfare is cognate to Britannia's ruling the waves, and offers similar support to their colonial policy. It is ironic that a single upheaval, World War II, finished off the last British colonies at the same time that it engendered the new Russian ones.

Practically everyone Ann talked to said they would like to leave or make it possible for their children to leave. This universal desire to "vote with one's feet" is the ultimate rock on which the Soviets' claims of democracy and freedom break up. We heard a joke about the Russian Ivan, who goes traveling in Eastern Europe and sends back postcards regularly to his friends in Moscow. For a while their messages are all the same: "Greetings from free Poland"; "Greetings from free Czechoslovakia"; "Greetings from free Hungary." Then there is a hiatus. After a few weeks comes the last postcard, this time from Vienna: "Greetings from free Ivan!"

Certainly passing out through the Iron Curtain is an unnerving experience, and a vicious insult to people who produced the likes of Chopin and Curie. As you stand in a forest of concrete and barbed wire, the plowed no-man's land stretching away on both sides to the horizon, guards with machine guns examine your papers minutely and probe your car for hidden bodies. This is the way out of paradise?

A grotesque sidelight on classical Marxist-Leninist theory is the way it is used to support the Russian Empire today. Because the State makes such an investment in raising the individual to be a productive worker, runs the argument, it has the right to hang onto him until he pays it back. The government becomes a vast Company Store to which every Czech, Pole, and Hungarian owes his soul. Thus these people's homelands are fenced off physically, and dotted with satanic mills in which they pay their dues. One is reminded of the debt-ridden Irish and the poverty-locked Indians about which Marx wrote so vehemently. What might he say if he toured Eastern Europe today?

The British Empire claimed a certain measure of civilizing strength. Look, they said, at railroads where there were only footpaths, hospitals in the bush, modern science replacing dark superstition. The Russian Empire also makes such claims, but nobody outside the propaganda mills believes them. Instead, the fundamental Russian strength stems from the way they make it

much more comfortable to go along than to raise trouble (as Reagan did).

You can see this graphically by comparing living conditions in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Where a popular revolt has been more recent, conditions are more harsh. Thus the Hungarians, who have been "going along" since 1956, are the most fortunate—they have plenty of good food, music in the cafes, and a certain amount of freedom of speech. The Czechs, who unloaded in 1968, are next. The least fortunate are the Poles, who are still restive after the recent Solidarity dustup. Although their fields are full of crops and animals, everything gets loaded into Russian trucks, which clog the roads going eastward. Polish restaurants wind up with one dish on the menu, usually potato stew. When vegetables arrive at a street market, people drop whatever they're doing and queue up. The message is this: make trouble and you get trouble.

So those who are nostalgic for the days of the Raj—and they still exist, in India and Africa—can take some comfort, I suppose. They need only look in the right place. In fact, colonialism is alive and well, and is living in Eastern Europe.

In France on Liberation Day

My favorite hotel in southern France has only six rooms, and the communal toilet is built into a disused staircase. You open the door to the stairs, walk up three steps, and sit down. But each room contains a tiny kitchen, with a closet full of pots and table service for four. It's a good place to hang out. Room 5, my favorite in the hotel, was converted from the old *grenier,* or storage attic. It opens onto a private rooftop terrace where you can write, eat, sunbathe, or gaze out over the tidy Provençal countryside. I am sitting on that terrace now, typing this article.

The hotel is called La Sousto; it is located in Fayence, about 30 miles inland from San Raphael. Fayence is a medium-sized village: for instance, it has a bank but no cinema. Nevertheless, it houses eight restaurants, one of which boasts a Michelin rosette. The village is perched on a hillside overlooking a lush valley filled with small farms and vineyards. Seen from below, its red-tiled roofs form a splashy patchwork against the green background of cypresses and olive and fig trees.

Like every respectable French village, Fayence contains a monument to its war dead—*les enfants de Fayence, mort pour la Patrie.* The original structure was built in 1919; it is a short granite column, on top of which a stone soldier in an overcoat and pot-helmet surveys the central square. The side plaques list 46 names from World War I. After World War II the monument was still in good shape, so the thrifty French found room on it for new names. In other villages you can sometimes see yet more names added, for Indochina, Algeria, Chad, and Lebanon. The French have gotten quite weary of adding names, and besides they are running out of room on their monuments.

Yesterday, May 8th, was Liberation Day; 39 years ago France was rescued from the Nazis. De Gaulle, Churchill, and Eisenhower rode down the Champs Elysées while bands played the Marseillaise and everybody wept for joy. Yesterday in every

French city and village a similar ceremony took place. It was a ritual of remembrance for the dead, as well as an opportunity to remind the current generation what happened, who did it, and why. We, who have never seen jack-booted invaders marching through our streets, must exercise our empathy to appreciate the intensity with which these events are recalled here.

In midmorning people began to gather in the square. Many men wore decorations—medals and combat ribbons pinned to their business suits. Here and there you could see the modest red riband of the Legion of Honor. A local brass band assembled, their instruments shimmering in the sun. Two gendarmes in neat blue uniforms halted traffic through the square. Someone opened the gate through the metal railing that surrounds the monument.

At exactly 11:30, the band struck up a march. A delegation of village officials, the *depot des gerbes,* unfurled flags for the veterans' organization and the city council. They marched an enormous floral wreath up to the base of the monument. They stepped back and faced the crowd. The band paused and then launched into the Marseillaise. Of all national anthems, ours included, this is certainly the most stirring. It speaks equally of valor and democracy: "*Aux armes, citoyens!*" The band played with gusto. The two gendarmes saluted; everybody else stood at attention. Afterwards the crowd applauded.

Then the head of the veterans' organization stood in front of the monument and motioned everyone closer. The people gathered in a semicircle around him. He reminded them of how the Second World War had touched everybody—not just the soldiers in uniform, but also the Resistance fighters, the people deported to extermination camps, the villagers bombed in their homes. They died, he said, so France itself would survive. It *had* survived, and would continue to do so. He closed with the formula "*Vive la France!*" The way he said it was not rabble-rousing, but rather firm and determined. France *would* live.

The mayor finished with a short address. He emphasized the solemnity of the occasion and its historical background. "Never

forget" was his message. His speech ended with the welcome information that the *Salle des Fetes* was now open.

A Frenchman's mind never strays far from his stomach. It is typical that this day of remembrance should be accompanied by a good drink. The characteristic ceremony is called an *aperitif d'honneur*—a toast, as it were, to the dead. In the *Salle des Fetes*, one street below the square, tables had been laid out with glasses and bottles. There was *pastis,* the anise-flavored liqueur so beloved of the French; vermouth, both red and white; muscadet wine; and fruit juices for those who were watching their livers. Dishes of local olives and fresh-baked little breadsticks provided munchies. The crowd trooped in and set to.

Meanwhile, the band had established itself at the end of the *salle*. They played a series of tunes, mostly French, that recalled the war years. Among them was "Three Cheers for the Red, White, and Blue." I guess it applies to the tricolor as well as to the stars and stripes. As the aperitifs did their job, there was a lot of backslapping and kissing on cheeks. Several couples got up and danced.

Finally the aperitifs ran out and it came to that most sacred period of the day, lunchtime. The villagers drifted away. In July they would celebrate Bastille Day, the birth of republican France, and in November they would salute the *morts* from World War I. Is it too much to remember your country three times each year? Not for the French. They have worked hard and sacrificed much for what they have. Keeping it requires a lot of remembering.

Messageries Maritimes

Washington Irving wrote in praise of sea travel. The interval at sea, he maintained, represents an ideal way to erase one's impressions of one continent before taking on the experiences of another. He saw a week or so at sea as having somewhat the same function as the bland sorbet that separates the fish course from the meat in a well-regulated gourmet dinner.

Nowadays, of course, we jet from land to land, from culture to culture. One night of uneasy semi-sleep in a stuffy airplane cabin is all that clears the impressions of a traveler going between London and Delhi or New York and Tangier. The cultural cushion that passenger ships used to provide is now simulated by the bland and cultureless Hilton-style hotel, which releases the traveler at one end and envelopes him at the other—a neutral environment that is neither European nor Asian, neither American nor African.

But passenger ships did more than just reset the traveler's cultural responses. They were also marvelous vehicles for making exotic friends and for evoking wide-ranging discussions. With nothing but the endless ocean to look at and no outside news except the noon wireless bulletins, sea travelers were thrown back on their primal intellectual resources. They were encouraged to stand away from the world and view it whole.

I came on the scene just at the tail end of classic passenger ship travel. With more ships being scrapped every year, I grabbed what was universally judged to be the best of the dying breed—Messageries Maritimes, the old French colonial service. It ran two services regularly out of Marseille: one through Suez to Colombo, Singapore, Saigon, Yokohama, and return, and the other via Panama to Tahiti, Sydney, and back. The ships were great old queens, with teakwood lounges, spacious outside cabins, and splendid cuisine. And (I kid you not), the second-class fares were actually cheaper than flying.

The first time I sailed on Messageries Maritimes was in 1961, from Yokohama to Saigon. The *Cambodge* disdained any kind of air conditioning, and we sweated down the South China Sea in the heat of September. I celebrated my birthday drinking little schmoo-shaped bottles of Perrier with a German kid, who like me was doing his *wanderjahr.* There was a young French doctor aboard, just married and out of medical school, who was taking his bride to the medical station at Kratie, up the Mekong river. We talked globally; about the civil war in Laos, which had not vet leaked down to Viet Nam, about the pros and cons of communism in China, and about the whole Oriental concept of life. But I also remember a heated discussion about whether it was really fair to require the Laotians to put license plates on elephants, as well as the possible mechanics of such attachment. When I stepped ashore in Saigon I felt practically no culture shock, for I was just re-entering the familiar world at a different point.

My taste for Messageries thus whetted, it was natural for me to book passage again in 1968. This time I was returning eastward from living a year in southern France. I went down to the great headquarters building facing the Marseille waterfront—an art-deco palace already showing the seedy look of imminent abandonment—and reserved a berth from Sydney to Panama. Thirty-six days, sixteen of them in port, for 300 Australian dollars—about $420 U.S.! Stops in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Tahiti, and Nuku Hiva! No travel agent could have painted a more attractive prospect.

In the event, it was everything I had hoped for and more. After making the trek across Asia and down through Indonesia, then hitchhiking through the center of Australia, I was ready for a little European comfort. The *Caledonien* stood white and regal at the Sydney pier even though she was making her last voyage, destined to be broken up in Marseille. We cast off with all the ceremonies, and settled down to three French meals a day with wine. I read old copies of Blackwood's Magazine and boned up on my French.

My companions aboard included a Canadian professor of geography, a Swedish engineer, a Swiss language teacher, and a funny little German named Alfred, whose quasi-nazi spoutings earned him progressively smaller helpings from Pierre, our discriminating French waiter. During the days in port, we swam and snorkeled while the ship loaded copra. On Efate we hired a guide to take us to a jungle village; he started shedding his clothes and putting feathers in his hair as we got farther and farther from the coast. On Nuku Hiva we got ourselves invited to a pig roast, where the *pièce de résistance* had been dispatched using modern technology, blows from a claw hammer. In Tahiti we toured the local bars and took a motor launch over to Moorea. At sea, we spent the days and evenings taking the world apart and putting it back together again. It was that kind of trip.

Thus when I finally quitted the ship in Panama, I was perfectly ready for the bus trip north to America and new employment. My month at sea had cleansed and reset my perceptions as no other experience could.

So I guard my memories of sailing on Messageries Maritimes, for the line has now disappeared. The nearest approach to passenger ships today are freighters that carry up to 12 voyagers, plus ships that make occasional cruise-like trips across the Atlantic. I recently took a cruise ship to see if I could recapture the old flavor. It was a lot of fun; but, alas, a ship that leaves one port and returns there remains chained to the land. It is a floating resort, not a means of passage. The people aboard achieve no cultural neutrality, for they are not really going anywhere. When they step off the ship, they go back to the same lives they had when they got on. Even though they are sailing the sea they are not true passengers, and their shipboard life cannot rival that of the old Messageries.

Opinions, Theory, and Whimsy

It is getting harder and harder to publish speculative ideas or "mere opinions." We live in a time when expertise is king. True knowledge is supposed to be pushed forward, bit by bit, by an army of accredited scholars, and only their pronouncements are worth listening to. All else is ignorant noise.

Yet if you read Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* it becomes evident that many important advances in knowledge have come from the noise-makers. They are the people who step outside the prevailing "paradigm" and look at old data in a new way. But they often have a problem getting heard.

One of the original aims of *The Ecphorizer* was to give oddball ideas a forgiving forum. It worked well in that role, even if nothing really important emerged. It benefited the contributors as well as the readers, for every thinking person gains from being published. To paraphrase Doctor Johnson, preparing an article for the cold reality of print "concentrates the mind wonderfully."

Naturally, as editor I took full advantage of the opportunity. I published odd theories and quirky observations with happy abandon. My main problem was that I couldn't separate the joy of writing from the seriousness of communication. Hence much of what I wrote was tongue-in-cheek. Ideas, set free, went romping through the magazine with never more than one foot on the ground. They had their fun while I had mine, and if the result might impair my reputation as a serious writer, so be it. ❖

The 35-Year Theory

The 35-Year Theory is actually a combination of a 45-year theory and a 10-year theory. The numbers are approximate, and careful analysis might reveal that it should be called "The 36.2-Year Theory" or some such. But 35 is close enough; it is the underlying principle that matters, not the exact amount. The important thing is that the 35-Year Theory gives us a handy tool for predicting the future.

The 45-year component springs from the fact that this is the median age at which people seem to have the most "thrust" in our society. The age group centered about 45-years-old is the one whose members are most effective in organizing their value structures, articulating their beliefs, and bringing about the changes they want. Before age 30, members of our society seldom manage to seize the instrumentalities of social power—money, political office, media stature. If they have power at all, it is because they are being catered to by their elders. At the other end, members of our society who are over 60 often possess power but have lost the desire to use it. Some have learned that fiddling with society is not the highest goal in life; some have become disillusioned with the individual's ability to effect social change; some are plain tired. Whatever the reason, the over-60s are predominantly content to retire from the battle and go fishing.

Between 30 and 60 lies the field of the 45-year-olds. They have social power and they use it. The 45-year median group ultimately decides which ideas are financed, developed and publicized, and which not; who are advanced to positions of authority and who not; and what facilities are created and placed in their hands. In our whole society, they are the group best able to get what they want.

But what, in fact, do they want? Here is where the 10-year component comes in. What they want is to solve the problems

they first learned about when they were 10 years old. Again, this is only a median number. But in the age range centered about 10, each child typically first realizes that there is a complex world operating outside the family—and that it is not in apple-pie order. Perhaps as early as 5 or as late as 15, he grasps the social problems that are the talk of the day and fixes them in his mind.

These childhood imprints are never fully forgotten. On the contrary, they emerge to guide behavior 35 years later, when the grown person has acquired the power to deal with them. It is naive to assume that human beings are so flexible that they react only to the important issues of the present. In fact they constantly redefine these issues in terms of a framework constructed when they first learned about social problems at all. We paint the world from the palette of our minds, using colors that were mostly squeezed out years ago. On the average, 35 years ago.

How does this work in practice? Instances abound of the 35-Year Theory in operation; exploring them in detail is obviously beyond the scope of this article. By way of example, however, it is instructive to list (in parallel columns 35 years apart) some of the more important events of American history in this century. They supply a convenient illustration, from which the basic principle becomes evident.

1915 Massive violations of sovereignty in Europe	1950 America intervenes to protect South Korea
1917 Communists rise to power in Russia	1952 Panic over communists in American government
1925 Teapot Dome scandals besmirch government	1960 Kennedy elected to bring Camelot to Washington
1932 Financial collapse in America; banks close	1967 "Great Society" aims to end poverty
1939-45 World War	1974-80 SALT negotiations
1946 Russians overrun Eastern Europe	1981 Strong foreign policy to "contain" Russia

So do you want to know what is going to happen in the news next year? Just go to the library and draw out a newspaper file for 1947. Skim through it, jotting down a list of the most memorable problems arising that year. You will find that these are the problems our leaders are going to try to solve in 1982.

Sexual Decay in *H. Sapiens*

In a recent paper[1], Alden and Mullens reported the results of a survey of terminated human sexual relationships, which indicated that sexual desire (referred to by the authors as "romantic love") decreases exponentially after inception, typically decaying to a non-measurable level in 6 to 18 months. The researchers advanced the hypothesis that "romantic love seems to have a half-life, much like radioactive decay."

The present research[2] supports that hypothesis, and further extends it by suggesting an exact quantification for the decay process. It shows that

$$T = G \frac{\sqrt{2}}{2} \qquad [a]$$

where T is the half-life of sexual desire for the species under study and G is the same species' natural gestation period. In *H. Sapiens,* G is 273 days; therefore T is 193 days and 58 minutes. In the laboratory, this is called the Lust Extinction Factor. The right-hand expression in formula [a] is derived from standard theories of exponential change in dynamic systems[3]. Regression analysis shows that formula [a] exhibits a chi-square test fit to Alden and Mullens' empirical data to a 0.96 confidence factor, well within standard limits for theoretical validity[4].

The role of G in formula [a] is of interest. The present research suggests that this is a constant deeply embedded in the evolution of social animals. Referring again to *H. Sapiens,* in the prototypic mating pair (before adculturation) sexual desire commonly results in fertilization, followed after the period G by parturition. The breeding population maximizes its survival rate by evolving responses such that the female transfers her

attentions from the impregnating male to the neonate during this process. To adapt to this transfer, breeding males evolve a simple Wallenden-Kirchstein decay curve in their sexual behavior, as expressed in formula [a].

In conclusion, the foregoing theory is offered as an explanation for frequently expressed, but hitherto unanalyzed, observations such as "the honeymoon is over," "after a few weeks they're all the same," and "you don't love me any more." Research is continuing in an effort to elicit the exact dynamics of the lust-to-boredom transition.

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The Rat in the Python

I believe in age demographics. I believe that in a society such as ours the age distribution of individuals has a decisive effect on what we think and what we do. For me, this distribution not only explains a large part of our current social behavior but also foreshadows much of our future. We live in a time when age demographics are the key to history.

It has not always been this way. During most of America's growth, the age distribution curve remained stable or changed gradually; hence its social effect was not particularly visible. But in the years after 1945 a unique demographic phenomenon was launched. Nothing quite like it had happened before, and its effects on our society became palpable. It was the "baby boom," also called the Rat in the Python.

For fifteen years or so after World War II we concentrated on injecting babies into American society. This effort peaked in 1952. Like a rat moving through a python, the resulting demographic blip then started moving along the age distribution curve, growing older year by year. In the 1960s the baby-boomers became teenagers; in the '70s they started buying houses; in the '80s they are beginning to accumulate estates. Hence a first approximation to understanding age demographics is to imagine that America was born in the years after World War II.

Another way to visualize the Rat in the Python is to measure the average age of our society. Today [1986] it is 31.6 years and growing, the oldest average we have ever experienced. In terms of influence, however, it is even older, because below age 13 the social impact of individuals drops off sharply. Hence the average age of the individuals that actually shape our tastes and actions will soon reach 40. We are truly an "aging society."

No "invisible hand" is required to translate age distribution into social behavior. We are a commerce-driven society, and

commerce always analyzes its market. In general, businesses that cater to the demographic middle grow and prosper; those that don't remain small and noninfluential, although they may do very well in their chosen niche. This is particularly true of the national media. In television, for example, the loop that connects viewer ratings, advertising rates, and program content is tight and responsive. TV shows, including the news, succeed just to the extent that they target the largest possible audience. As a result, the information we all receive tends to be the information most agreeable to those of us born in the late 1940s.

By similar mechanisms the baby-boom Rat tends to elect legislators, influence judges, determine foreign policy, and manipulate our overall lifestyle. Besides being the center of the news and the focus of mass merchandising, it represents the largest community of values in the country and hence the most effective political target. By rewarding national decision makers who cater to their tastes, those born in the late '40s establish *de facto* norms for all the rest of us.

How has the age of the Rat in the Python affected our history so far? Take economics, for example. During the '60s and '70s American banks and government agencies handled money as if they were teenagers—borrow as much as you can, spend it freely, and loan what's left to your ne'er-do-well friends. They accumulated vast debts without any clear plan for repayment, ran perpetual budget deficits, and accepted IOUs from foreign countries that would normally have had little credit standing. The consequences, from the perspective of the mature Rat, are now evident: a towering backlog of unpayable debts and the habit of debasing paper money with respect to tangible property. Fortunately, the Rat is now entering the hard-work-and-savings time of life. Provided it retains confidence in paper money, the Rat will probably save more of it than it borrows. This will push down interest rates and make it easier for the bankers to sweep all those bad debts under the carpet.

In domestic policy, the aging Rat has become disenchanted with fixing social problems by a few quick tricks. Nobody talks about

the "Great Society" anymore, or even about the "War on Poverty." After you reach 30 you realize that life is a very complicated business, and the less you tinker with other people's lives the less likely you are to mess them over. Thus Government by promises and flashy "programs" are giving way to steady-as-she-goes. To liberal charges that its attitude is unprogressive, the Rat replies: "Look at me—I made it OK."

In foreign policy, the Rat is becoming tired of the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction as a way of life. The idea of protecting your home by stockpiling dynamite may appeal to juveniles, who love fireworks and think they're never going to die; but it gets scary as you grow older and more cautious. Regardless of the technical merits of Star Wars, the idea of Effective Defense is much more satisfying to an adult. And if the Rat can ever manage it, the concept of Arms Control is the most mature of all.

What future social effects can we expect from the Rat? Certainly an increasingly conservative society, one based more on preserving the status quo than on trying to reform the world. A society where personal security is more important than progress, and wisdom more valued than brightness.

Does the Rat have any big surprises in store for us? The main one I foresee will happen about 30 years from now, when the Rat stops working and expects to be supported in its "golden years." As most of us are aware, the Social Security program is not a savings plan; it is a plan whereby those who are now working are forced to support those who are now retired. This will work fine while the Rat is employed (and I, who will retire ahead of the Rat, plan to take full advantage of it). But sometime around 2015 the Rat is going to stop earning money and show up at the Government's benefits window, bringing with it a lifetime of expectations and the votes to enforce them. The poor slobs still working are going to find their hands full and their pockets empty.

If you are doing any long-term investing (your IRA funds, for example), keep the Rat in mind. Ask yourself what 40- and 50-

year-olds are going to do with their money. Expect a decline in interest rates—possibly even deflation. Among all the shifting factors that may influence the value of investments in the future, none are more predictable than the steady aging of the Rat in the Python.

National Frontiers

When you're traveling, there's always something special about entering a new country. Every frontier becomes a tangible presence when a uniformed official examines your passport, then reaches for the stamp that signifies you have been accepted as a visitor in a foreign state. It gives me a psychological kick.

Of course there are frontiers and there are frontiers. The last time I pushed a baggage cart through the "Nothing To Declare" door at Heathrow, my mind turned back to a very different frontier—to the day in 1960 when I hoisted my backpack and walked alone, past deserted rice paddies, several miles from the customs post at Poipet, Cambodia, to the border guard shacks at Aranyaprathet, Thailand. I doubt that many tourists have gone that way since.

The Khyber route from Pakistan into Afghanistan clings to a mountainside bristling with ancient fortresses. In the flat Baluchi desert, however, the Pako-Iranian frontier used to be marked only by a multilingual sign advising you to switch to the other side of the road, because Pakistan drives on the left and Iran on the right. Luckily, traffic at that location was always light.

It is ironic that many of the hardest-fought frontiers are today the least visible. In western Europe, you cross the battle-weary boundaries between Germany and France, Italy and Austria, simply by waving your passport at a smiling policeman. On the other hand, the newest and most artificial frontiers tend to be the most difficult. Where the Russian armies happened to stop in 1945, there are now [1986] minefields, barbed wire, and very unsmiling soldiers. Between India and Pakistan you pass a battery of army posts, each demanding a fresh examination of papers. I suspect that once a frontier has been established by enough blood and treaties it no longer needs defending. It's only the untried ones that require a show of muscle.

I once crossed a frontier that was nonexistent on one side. To visit Israel from Jordan in 1977, I obtained a travel permit from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior. At the Allenby Bridge the Jordanians scrupulously avoided stamping my passport, maintaining the fiction that I was simply visiting a western province of Jordan. On the Israeli side, however, soldiers examined my papers carefully and performed a meticulous examination for weaponry, right down to probing my toothpaste tube. When I returned a week later the Jordanians just waved me back in. Officially, I had never left their country.

We tend to assume that national frontiers are always the hard-won variety, the kind whose locations have been hammered out over generations. However, this is not the case with the majority, particularly those in Asia and Africa. They are typically remnants of colonial organization charts, set up for the convenience of nineteenth century European bureaucrats. The border between Nigeria and Niger, for example, defined the limits of British and French influence a century ago. Today it has little meaning for the people who live there, except as a source of income for the border guards.

Conversely, the lumping together of Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba (plus dozens of other cultures) in Nigeria was an administrative convenience for the Colonial Office in London. Today it is useful only to mapmakers. In fact it generated a mass of human misery in 1967-9, when the Ibos tried to correct the map by forming Biafra.

Given the irrationality of most third-world national frontiers, I have always been puzzled at the way they are slavishly respected by Western governments. An Idi Amin or a Pol Pot can wallow in genocide as long as he stays within little lines drawn on a map. We do nothing because "it's an internal affair." Should he be so foolish as to send his soldiers across one of those painted lines, however, alarm bells finally ring. "Armed aggression" declares the United Nations, and a "peacekeeping force" is assembled. Peace is thus treated as a function of geography, not of human life.

George Washington, an ex-mapmaker who warned us about "entangling alliances," would surely have scratched his wig in wonder if he had been told that we would one day fight major wars in Korea and Viet Nam because certain soldiers had marched across certain parallels of latitude. But he would have been even more nonplussed to learn how much murder in neighboring countries we were prepared to ignore, simply because it did not involve theoretical border violations.

Thus a "national frontier algorithm" seems to govern the propriety of intervening in foreign pogroms. If blood doesn't flow across a border, it's not our concern. I can only surmise that we adopt this rule of thumb for much the same reasons that the colonial powers drew up artificial national boundaries: as a convenience. We can narrow the world's multiplicity of troubles to those few instances when troops actually march across borders.

But of course this algorithm is eagerly supported by every third-world despot, for it gives him license to control his people. The loudest to cry for "national sovereignty" are those who are plundering and murdering the very nationals for whom they purport to cry.

In our domestic polity, we have finally agreed that the dictum "a man's home is his castle" does not sanction a man's beating his family behind closed doors. The equivalent maturity in international affairs, however, still eludes us.

Why do we fall all over ourselves respecting national frontiers? Besides being a convenience, I think this attitude also reflects our inbred optimism about foreign governments. Despite massive evidence to the contrary, our opinion makers assume that all regimes are nascent democracies. If we just leave them alone and let them "develop" through their "growing pains"... so goes the theory. Unfortunately, the payoff for this policy always seems to lie somewhere beyond tomorrow. Meanwhile, the local generals grow fat.

So I still get a kick out of going through Immigration in places like Burma or Burkina Faso. But at the same time I am conscious that the line I am crossing is as likely to cover up institutionalized evil as it is to promote the aspirations of the people who live behind it. National frontiers are a game; and like every game they produce a few winners but also many losers.

The Agony of Africa

When one returns from three months of land travel in central Africa, people automatically ask: What's it like there? What's going on? There are, of course, many things to describe: the variety and fascination of different lifestyles, the majesty of the rivers and jungles, the wondrous variety of animals and plants, the warmth and vibrancy of the people. One can also mention the squalor of the cities, the oppressiveness of the governments, the problems of disease and poverty. But there is an overall situation in central Africa that I feel is insufficiently recognized outside the continent. It is the prospective collapse of most of the "European" facilities—particularly power and transport systems—on which the current generation of Africans has learned to depend. When these go, central Africa will begin the agonizing process of returning to the nineteenth century.

By "central Africa" I mean roughly the countries between South Africa and the Sahara. They are mostly lands where European colonizers firmly installed themselves and then departed completely. Had the colonizers never come in the first place, or had they managed to stay in significant numbers, things might be different. It is the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't nature of European technology that has set in motion the agony of Africa. Future historians may say that the whole process of partial Europeanization, followed by the rapid departure of the Europeans, constituted the most massive dirty trick in history.

From a technical viewpoint, maintaining a railway system or an electrical power net is not easy. If you let the quality of the system fall too far, the whole suddenly becomes unusable. Thus there is a point at which a railway track becomes so hazardous that you dare not run a train on it; where a power line becomes so leaky that you dare not feed electricity into it. Then you must either find the skill and money to rebuild the facility or you must learn to do without it. These technological facilities—along with

hard-surfaced roads, telephone systems, piped water and so on —of course did not exist in central Africa before the Europeans put them there. They were largely in place and working when the Europeans left in the 1960s, although there were cases of last-minute sabotage by the departing colonials. In very general terms, they kept working on their own momentum during the 60s. During the 1970s, still speaking very generally, the new African nations came to grips with the problems of maintenance. But their efforts depended largely on imported skills and borrowed money. In the heyday of third-world loan syndication, normally skeptical American and European bankers were talked into providing vast sums for projects in places they couldn't even find on the map. This money kept things going for another decade.

Today, the systems that were left in place in the 1960s have been patched and re-patched but are still rapidly disintegrating. New loan money has virtually disappeared, as bankers scramble just to keep the old debts out of default. The local skills and resources that were supposed to pick up the load at this point are completely inadequate. For example, over 80% of the formerly hard-surfaced roads in Zaire are now useable, if at all, only by 4-wheel-drive vehicles; rail schedules are being cut back in Nigeria; the electric supply fails regularly in the Ivory Coast and other countries; and phone service is on its last legs everywhere.

It is no put-down on Africans that they are not coping with European technology. For one thing, they didn't ask for it in the first place. For another, these sophisticated systems were mostly transplanted without modification from Europe to the vastly more difficult African environment. Distances are greater, heat and humidity are more severe, parasites and diseases abound. The Europeans themselves found it difficult to keep their machines going in Africa. But they managed it, and at the same time convinced the Africans that their machines were essential to good living.

Thus the problem, in a nutshell, is that during the colonial period Africans learned to want and depend on things that they are unable to provide for themselves today.

Whatever happened to the vision of the decolonizers, the idea that once Africans were unshackled from European exploitation they would build modern nations by themselves? So far it hasn't happened, and I see no evident mechanism by which it will happen in the future. Two reasons are commonly cited for this departure from plan, reasons that arose from misconceptions about Africans that would have made Pollyanna blush.

The first misconception was that Africans are a basically homogeneous people. Nothing could be more wrong. In Zambia alone there are 73 distinct tribal groups, and most other countries are made up of hundreds. These groups are as different in customs, values, and lifestyles as any European countries. They speak mutually incomprehensible languages and practice different religions. They tend to scorn and mistrust one another. Before the colonizers came, their dominant mode of interaction was warfare. In most central African countries today, one tribe or even one family controls the government; being unable to obtain a natural consensus with the other groups, they must rule by force and manipulation. We see blacks ruling blacks and think that everything must be OK. But at least in this area the average African is more sophisticated politically than the average American; he understands instinctively why we don't want Russians in the White House, even though they are white like us.

The problem is that any government which rules a mistrustful people by force finds it hard to get anything constructive done. Most communal energy gets wasted in bickering and corruption. Several central African rulers have thrown up their hands and simply concentrated on looting their own countries, letting everything else slide.

The other misconception is that Africans are possessed of a natural European work ethic, which was sapped and suppressed by the colonizers. It is true that Africans can, and often do, work very hard—harder in fact than most Europeans. But they do not

have a natural tradition of structuring their work in the ways demanded by complex technological systems. Life in Africa, even in colonial times, never stimulated or required such a tradition. In general, Africans place less emphasis on abstract causes and delayed effects than Europeans do, while being more attentive to immediate events. Thus a typical African railway crew will be less concerned to change a bearing today so the wheel won't freeze tomorrow, while at the same time being more alert to the bearing when it does fail. Unfortunately, this is not the best way to run a railroad. In effect, African railroads were designed by people with one set of work habits and then handed over to people with an entirely different set.

Well, what do the central Africans need all this stuff for, anyway? Won't they be better off without things like railroads and electricity? Fifty years ago, perhaps, the colonizers might have been able to dismantle their machines and cart them away without causing much pain. But modern Africans have acquired a dependence that is at least psychological and in many cases also physical. They feel they *should* have these things. Before leaving, the colonizers succeeded in convincing them that life with complicated machines is much better than life without. Cold turkey de-mechanization is not a practical option today.

So what is likely to happen? Over the next 20 to 30 years, I foresee the progressive disappearance from central Africa of most European technology. Obviously it will not disappear everywhere at the same rate. In particular, countries with exploitable resources such as copper or oil will still be able trade them for imported technological goodies. But eventually central Africa will "go bush," as the ex-colonials call it. The people will be forced into new ways of living, closer to the nineteenth century than to the twentieth.

The tragedy is that this process will almost certainly involve great human suffering. Aside from the psychological pain of ruined expectations, there will undoubtedly be repeated political upheavals, massive personal dislocations, periods of chaos. When such events happen in Africa they are usually

accompanied by murder, starvation, and disease. The world may look on with dismay, but I doubt that we will do any more to help than we did in Biafra or Uganda. The human suffering we have already seen in those places is just a foretaste of the agony of Africa yet to come.

Boeru, Britu, and the Press

I have visited South Africa three times and other parts of Africa several more times. Every time I return from South Africa, my liberal friends ask me what it is like. Did I see blacks being rounded up by dogs every evening and herded into their shantytowns? Did the real Africans bow their heads and cringe every time a white person talked to them? I always had to reply that I saw none of this. On my last visit, during which I drove two thousand miles through black areas as well as white, I did manage to find and photograph a "whites only" sign at a beach resort. This was the only tangible evidence I could produce of the highly publicized evils of apartheid.

On the other hand, I had to report that I saw black farms and villages cleaner and more prosperous than any others in Africa; a government run by laws instead of corruption; and the only country in Africa without massive crime and endemic starvation. Both in the cities and in the enclaves I saw people as proud and self-realizing as any in Africa. A black truck driver who regularly drove in from Zambia told me he always breathed a sigh of relief when he crossed the border, because he knew he was safe there. It seemed to me that South Africa was a model that the rest of the continent could profitably follow.

But when I reported these observations to my friends they shook their heads in pity. I had been duped by mere appearances, they said; worse than that, I saw only what I wanted to see because I was at heart a "racist." In this view they agreed with the vast majority of the American press. For example, nearly every day now [1986] the *Christian Science Monitor* carries an article critical of the South African government. Other publications routinely compare the Boers to the Nazis. The cry for their summary expulsion is universal.

For a long time I wondered how it was possible that my judgments could be so different from those in the American

press. Then one day it dawned on me. In my travels I had come to think of African politics in tribal terms; for me, the typical African government consists of one closely-knit group (often one extended family) ruling a hundred or more disparate tribes or cultural groups. Africans themselves usually describe their situation this way. So I had automatically treated South Africa as just another African country in which a particular tribe had seized power. To me it was incidental that the ruling tribe had white skins.

But apparently the non-racist press saw it differently. Blacks ruling blacks was always OK, no matter how alien their cultures or ruthless their methods. Whites ruling blacks was inherently heinous—a blot on humanity—no matter how beneficial the results.

At the same time I realized another thing. Most press criticism was based on reports of civil rights violations in South Africa, although I was convinced that their record in this area was far better than the African average. It occurred to me that the Boers are unique among African rulers in that they write and publish laws that they abide by. This makes their violations of civil rights a matter of record and hence easily reportable. On the other hand, the intertribal repression and discrimination that is common in the rest of Africa is hard to document. It is carried out by the army, at night, behind stone walls. Only in the bigger cases—Angola, Biafra, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, and Zaire, to name a few—does it make headlines.

This started me wondering. Suppose the rulers in Pretoria, doing exactly what they are doing now, had black skins. Suppose further that instead of passing repressive laws they simply ordered the army out as they thought fit. How would the American press judge them?

I don't know the answer. But asking this question inspired me to write an alternative summary of my understanding of South African history, treating the Boers and the British as just two more local tribes. I had to change the names a bit, to get free of

their connotations, but you'll understand it anyway. Here it is, for your entertainment.

* * *

In the beginning, the southern part of Africa was inhabited by the !Ke ("Bushmen") and the Khoi-Khoi ("Hottentots"). But in the seventeenth century a number of other tribes began to invade, annihilating the original inhabitants as they came. These tribes included the Sotho, Venda, Tsonga, Nguni, Swazi, Zulu, Themba, Xhosa, and Boeru. The first eight moved in by land from the northeast; the Boeru arrived in boats along the coast. Of the original !Ke and Khoi-Khoi, only a handful remain. There is no serious possibility of their ever establishing a government in their land.

Among the newcomers, the Boeru were particularly skilled in weaponry, although their primary interest was farming. When they met the migrating Xhosa around 1770, they managed to drive them back eastward. About this time another tribe, the Britu, arrived on the coast, again in boats. They generally allied themselves with the Boeru.

Out of this cultural mix, the Zulus rose from a tribe of a few thousands to become the most ferocious warriors in southern Africa. Led by a series of unscrupulous chiefs, they destroyed or enslaved most of their neighbors. Soon they collided with the Boeru and the Britu. These "boat people" finally managed to subjugate the Zulus in 1879, thereby becoming the principal tribes in the region.

Within twenty years, however, the Boeru and Britu were at each other's throats. By 1902 they had settled their differences, sharing the rule under nominal Britu authority. Today the Boeru are on top.

Under Boeru rule, South Africa has become a prosperous African nation. Its crime and unemployment rates are the lowest on the continent and its literacy rate is the highest. Its wage rates are exceeded only in the oil producing countries. Although

government business is conducted in a tribal language (Afrikaans), English is widely spoken.

For the last forty years, the Boeru have been conducting an experiment unique in political history. They are carving out parts of the territory that they conquered a century ago and are giving them back to the tribes they conquered. The only parallel I am aware of is the American system of Indian reservations. However, many people regard this program as one of the Boeru's major sins against humanity.

Day-to-day Boeru ruling methods are also unique. The following specific practices, common in the rest of Africa, are virtually unknown among the Boeru:

New governments arresting or murdering outgoing officials
Armed soldiers routinely extorting money from the populace
Diverting huge sums of government revenue to private pockets
Demanding and then stealing foreign aid
Police actively participating in crime
Tolerating massive black markets in goods and currency
Requiring bribes for ordinary government transactions.

Nevertheless, it is often suggested that foreign governments should intervene in South Africa to oust the Boeru. What would likely happen if the Boeru were driven from power? The same forces would not tolerate the Britu, so power would have to descend to one of the other tribes. Although "democracy" is usually mentioned as the intended outcome, this flies in the face of the whole history of Africa. Of the many attempts at democracy in the rest of that continent, many of them aided by massive outside pressure and support, not one has ever succeeded. I see no evidence to suggest that South Africa would be an exception once the Boeru and Britu were gone.

No, I believe that the likely outcome would be a bloody settling of old scores among the tribes that have been held in peace by Boeru/Britu rule. After that, of course, the Boeru and Britu themselves would have to be neutralized. If they were lucky,

they would be allowed to cash out at a few cents on the dollar (as happened in East Africa) and go into exile. Otherwise they would be quietly annihilated. Then, finally, peace would settle upon South Africa with another tribe in charge. Those that lost out in the power struggle would just have to knuckle under.

* * *

If the "Boeru" and "Britu" had black skins, the foregoing summary would read like just another characteristic chapter in the history of African politics—with the exception that outside attempts to force them from their government would be regarded as unconscionable meddling in a foreign country's "internal affairs." But of course they are white. It appears to me that this is where the press draws the line. Behavior tolerated every day in black African tribes becomes unendurable in a white African tribe. That is why the "Boeru" and "Britu" have to go.

A last note about "racism." If your job is writing newspaper headlines or directing 30-second TV "newsbreaks," you will find it much easier to identify black-white discrimination than the black-black variety. Who can keep track of Hausa versus Ibo, or Tutsi versus Hutu? But I am convinced that the latter is a far more destructive force in Africa than the former. Getting rid of the white government in South Africa may remove the one, but only at the cost of unleashing the other. Is that what the American press really wants?

Wanted: $4.5 Billion

Among life's many fantasies, some of the most interesting and useful center around the notion of one's being in charge of Really Big Money. I am not talking about a mere twenty or fifty million. The idea of that kind of cash evokes merely personal, inward fantasies—private islands, jets stocked with compliant bunnies, and so on. No, Really Big Money is by definition beyond the capacity of any individual to consume. Thinking about it forces one to look outward at the state of the world and how it could be bettered.

Let's talk about $4.5 billion. I pick this figure because, according to *Forbes,* there happens to be a gentleman in Arkansas who actually has that much. Hence our fantasy is not just a pipe dream. Suppose he could be convinced to lay it all out on a single project for the betterment of mankind. What would we propose?

As you may have guessed by now, I have a suggestion.

As I look into the foggy blue future, I see an increasing amount of international conflict. Not between the "superpowers," although they will doubtless continue to stick their fingers into as many foreign pies as they can get away with. Not with Western Europe or Japan, as long as they remain prosperous. The conflicts I foresee will ferment in the balkanized Third World—particularly those misbegotten "nations" with rudimentary governing skills, halting economies, and massive internal ethnic conflicts. Back when the actual Balkans were generating World War I (and, by extension, World War II), a British wit remarked that their problem was that they "produced more history than they could consume locally." I believe we face the same kind of problem today, except that it is now spread over most of the globe and is fueled by weaponry that makes the two World Wars look like barroom brawls.

Let's now consider the typical process by which these conflicts arise. The government of Blogistan, having mismanaged into collapse the local industries that traditionally fed the population, casts about for a diversion to keep itself in power. Behold, it's all the fault of the Wagga minority, who are supported by the evil neighboring country of Bugistan! The Blogis have just enough money left to buy a fleet of attack helicopters and attack Bugistan, so they do it. But then Waggistan, to the south, feels compelled to invade Bugistan to help the Waggas, who are now fighting as guerillas. This attracts the interest of Washington and Moscow, and so we're off to the races...

Is there any point in this process at which the application of $4.5 billion might break the chain? Just perhaps.

While the visible top players in these melées may be ex-colonels with minimal education, the real support comes from the civil services involved. They represent the educated, competent elite of their countries. These career managers, diplomats, and technocrats usually provide the advice and implementation that can spell the difference between war and negotiation. If, for example, the Blogistan Ministry of Economics had been a little more sophisticated in their planning, or the Bugistan Foreign office a little more diplomatic, or if the Waggistan cabinet had understood the historical context a little better, things might have turned out differently.

So it is germane to ask how these civil servants are educated. A tiny fraction have been to Europe, or the U.S. or Russia. Most, however, are educated locally. I have visited their universities and talked to the professors. They do as good a job as they can, but their approach tends to be inherently provincial. At the University of Blogistan you learn the glorious history of the country (now 20 years old) and what is known locally about its industries and agriculture. You learn very little about neighboring Bugistan or Waggistan, and what you learn about modern management and finance is limited to the extent that you can attract professors from Europe or America. You may get

a fair education, but it will be a strictly Blogistanian education. Separate, and not very equal.

Hence I see a possibility. If the future civil servants of the Third World could be induced to start with a broader education—learn firsthand what is going on in other countries, rub elbows with students from the neighboring states, talk to professors with a worldwide perspective—they might not lead their countries into their present chronic troubles. Would Blogistan be as likely to invade Bugistan if their Prime Ministers had shared the same dormitory? Would their Ministry of Food have screwed up as badly if the senior officers had gone to a good agricultural college? Would the Blogi diplomats have been as ready to blame the Waggas for their troubles if they had taken Regional History from a Wagga professor? Maybe not.

How could $4.5 billion make this happen? What I envision is a unique kind of university, one made up of many small campuses spread around the world. Both students and faculty would circulate among the campuses. It is too much to ask that every small country accept a campus ("we already have a very good university, thank you"); but there are certain places, reasonably accessible to students in their region, that probably would. Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Kenya, Egypt, and the Ivory Coast spring to mind. Maybe Hungary, Pakistan, and someplace in South or Central America. Plus, of course, Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. The campuses would all be small, and they needn't all be built at the outset, but this kind of distributed structure would be the goal.

Thus an engineering student from East Africa might start out at the Kenya campus. After one year he would transfer to Singapore for electronics classes, then finish up in Germany. A student destined for his country's foreign service might go to Hong Kong and Britain. Along the way, all the students would have an opportunity to get to know each other. Who knows? Some of the problems they would otherwise try to solve with helicopters twenty years later might get disposed of in dorm-room debates.

Similarly, some of the faculty would rotate. Each campus would be able to get its share of top-rate professors (who wouldn't mind two years in India, for example) from the total teaching staff. In addition there would be a permanent cadre at each campus, most of whom would be drawn from the region.

I realize that what I propose is already being done to a limited extent through student exchanges and extension campuses at universities like Harvard and Cambridge. But the institution I envision would have far greater neutrality. It would not be associated with any particular country or culture. Its graduates would not be as stigmatized by a "foreign education"—often an important point with their governments. And more of them would opt to return home than those who had gone for four years to Britain or America.

The key factor would be the truly international nature of this university. It would be "owned" by the Third World as a whole, not by one of the industrialized countries. It would emphasize teaching its students how to function better in their own cultures, not how to imitate someone else's culture. It could form a rallying-point for the best third-world teachers, who now tend to migrate to European or American universities. All this would be possible as long as it maintained a neutral and transnational posture.

Would such a university attract students and faculty? I think so, if it were properly done. Besides the attraction of go-to-school-and-see-the-world, it would offer a good compromise between local education and the Harvard/Cambridge variety. It could easily acquire a cachet of quality and a recognized name without imperialistic overtones. Third-World parents would consider it an honor to send their children there, and graduates would find readier employment when they returned home.

How about costs? While board and tuition would be steep by Third-World standards, it would probably be cheaper than the equivalent American or European universities. And I believe the money is there. To begin with, most students would come from the relatively affluent families that exist in all Third-World

countries. Others could be supported by government grants (as many are now in America). I can even imagine a support-a-student program of small donations from individuals in Europe and America to fund scholarships.

Such a university would have unique, but not unsolvable, logistical problems. Every campus would need comprehensive housing for students and faculty. The university as a whole would charter a lot of airplane seats. A significant portion of the staff would do nothing but fool with visas and passports. Some students might not be able to go to all campuses, and all would be under strict behavior rules with respect to their host countries. The curriculum would have to allow for closing any campus in the event of political trouble.

But given a sufficient monetary push at the beginning to get the project going, I think all these problems could be overcome. In short, I believe that the university I envision would work. And it just might go a long way toward alleviating some of the political problems the world will face in the twenty-first century. At least, I believe that it's worth a try.

In fact, I think this fantasy could be realized for only $4.4 billion. giving our hypothetical Daddy Warbucks $100 million left over to pursue his own private fantasies. No one could ask for more than that.

Noveltymongering

This Christmas [1985] I was reminded of something that has bothered me my whole life. To begin with, I love Christmas carols. They get me into the holiday spirit, and because I hear them only once a year they never become boring. But when I tuned into carol programs on the radio this year, I never seemed to find them in an unadorned state. I could find "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem" with a bossa nova beat, or a flashdance version of "Hark the Herald Angels," or a punk rock "Jingle Bells." But what happened to the originals?

It seems to me that they have fallen victim to a class of merchandizing that one might call "noveltymongering." The noveltymongers make money by selling you something familiar tricked out in a new dress, as if it were something new.

I have no objection to novelty per se. It is as essential to culture as seasoning is to cuisine. And I agree with the liberal argument that today's novelty is often tomorrow's classic. But I object when noveltymongering has either of these effects:

- The novelty element adds nothing to the original, like putting catsup on chocolate ice cream. It just clutters up our culture with noise. The worst part is that this kind of novelty is usually supported by the most pervasive advertising. Soap and cigarettes are sold this way.
- The novelty version displaces the original. It becomes difficult, unfashionable, and expensive to root out the real thing. At first you only bear the burden of finding a store that sells ice cream without catsup. Ultimately, however, you find that the non-catsuped form is a "special order," available only from a few mail-order boutiques.

Perhaps the most spectacular case of noveltymongering in recent times occurred in American automaking. Fins, holes in the fenders, exotic radiator grills, chrome curlicues—the gewgaw

machines pushed real automobiles off the road. To get an unadorned car, you had to buy a Checker for twice the price. In the end, of course, the Germans and the Japanese gave the noveltymongers their comeuppance, with results that are even today the bane of Detroit.

What goes on in the minds of the noveltymongers? How do otherwise sober Detroit executives get so lost in fantasy-land? Part of the answer is that novelty is an easy merchandising cop-out. It is hard to sell soap as just good soap; so much easier to sell it as a secret laboratory blend of science-fiction ingredients that turn "washday" from a chore into a self-realizing experience. Similarly, the poobahs of the auto industry found it a strain to sell cars that offered only safety, economy, reliability, and comfort.

But I believe there is a more fundamental factor at work here. For the average driver, a car is an important part of life—but it is still a fractional part, something one thinks about only a few minutes a day. For the auto executive, on the other hand, cars are almost life itself. Their design is his lifelong preoccupation. As a result, his taste loses perspective. The consumer can look at a Datsun and think "Yes, that's a pretty good car"; the automaker, looking at the same vehicle, tends to think "Who'd want to buy that dumb thing?"

Examples of this phenomenon abound. I finally abandoned my season tickets to the San Francisco Opera because each year the repertoire became more and more recherché. I could almost hear the repertoire committee saying, "Oh God, not another *Bohème*! Can't we find an obscure seventeenth century work to demonstrate how sophisticated we are?" Thus a group of people who have seen *Bohème* thirty times can ingenuously decide that it is too ordinary for those who have seen it only twice. At the other end of the artistic spectrum, *Playboy* gradually abandoned "the girl next door" in its layouts and substituted tired-looking jades who were chained in cages, slathered with butter, etc. Whoever did the selecting lost touch with the audience. The more you look, it seems, the less you see.

And this Christmas I imagined I overheard a record executive, captured in the throes of creative decision making. "We can't put out another *Silent Night*," he moaned, "I've heard it a thousand times. Hey, how about this year doing it with a calypso beat and a steel drum band?"

Automatic Rejection Slips

Last year [1984] the world community of fine art dealers was scandalized by the discovery of a major abstract expressionist painter, ranking with de Kooning and Rothko, who had been working for forty years in total obscurity. By "total obscurity" I mean that Harold Shapinsky had from time to time tried to get gallery owners and museum curators to look at his work; after repeated rebuffs, he had given up and retreated to a tiny one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan, where he painted on paper because he was too poor to afford canvas. In May, 1985, on his sixtieth birthday, Shapinsky finally achieved his first public show anywhere. All of his paintings sold easily, at around $20,000 apiece.

The story of how Harold Shapinsky finally came to the attention of the commercial art dealers—an intricate series of inspirations and coincidences worthy of O. Henry—is told by Lawrence Wechsler in *The New Yorker* for December 16, 1985. It is too detailed to recount here. But one persistent motif stands out. It is the massive reluctance of art professionals to take the time just to glance at a few slides of his work (much less examine the work itself), followed by their frantic excitement after they had been somehow induced to look.

The stone wall against which Shapinsky butted his head, until he finally gave up, was not a lack of appreciation of his work. Every knowledgable dealer who finally saw it liked it. His stone wall was more structural; it was everyone's refusal to merely *consider* his work on its merits. I call this the "automatic rejection slip."

For eleven years an unknown writer named Toole sent a book manuscript to virtually every American publisher, with no results. In despair, he killed himself. His mother then took up the quest, finally talking a university press into bringing it out. In 1980 the book, *A Confederacy of Dunces,* won the Pulitzer Prize.

Once the automatic rejection slip had been overcome, the book became eligible for serious evaluation.

To verify this phenomenon, a freelance writer named Chuck Ross laboriously typed into manuscript Jerzy Kosinski's *Steps,* a novel that had won the National Book Award. He changed its title and authorship and sent it to fourteen publishers and thirteen literary agents. The manuscript was curtly rejected by all, including its original publisher.

Chester Carlson offered his xerography patents to seven large firms, including Kodak and IBM, before Haloid corporation picked them up. Van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime. Proust had to self-publish Swann's Way... and so on. The list of works by unknown creators that have become great successes after being automatically rejected is a long one.

Of course the Automatic Rejectors offer explanations on their side. Proust's writing, for example, is undoubtedly wordy. Andre Gide, who evaluated *Swann* for the *Nouvelle Revue Française,* later explained somewhat lamely that he thought Proust was a "social butterfly" and had only glanced at the manuscript. The companies that rejected xerography knew nothing of the potential market for copiers. And we all know that Van Gogh was ahead of his time. But such rationalizations won't wash in the cases of Shapinsky the painter, or Toole the novelist, or Kosinsky's manuscript. Their creations, once given respectability, were immediately hailed by essentially the same crowd that had automatically rejected them earlier.

What happens here? While in theory every creative work should have absolute value, inhering in it even when it is found "washed up on the beach," in fact this is not so. Connoisseurs speak of "provenance" and "historical patina," meaning those factors of authorship or circumstances that add to a work's value. Strip them away, and many creations become no longer recognizable. A dealer who handles *only* works of familiar provenance will find it natural to reject them out of hand.

Thus the folklore of the "over-the-transom" manuscript, the starving artist's painting, the crackpot invention. We don't want to know them because we never met their parents.

After the success of Proust's work, Gide wrote a public apology for ignoring it. One wonders how much remorse was experienced by the Kodak executives who rejected xerography or the New York gallery owners who missed their chance to handle Shapinsky. Was it sufficient to convince them to spend a few more minutes with the next unknown who demands their time? Probably not. They can argue that cases of that sort come along only once or twice in a lifetime. But that leaves an important question open: do they come along infrequently because unknowns do not do good work, or is it rather that a large proportion of good work by unknowns becomes permanently buried by the automatic rejection slip? All the works I have cited survived it; but how many did not? This is a question worth thinking about.

We are all Automatic Rejectors at least once in a while. When was the last time you passed up a movie because it didn't feature a big-name star? Or turned off the classical music station when they announced a work by a composer you never heard of? Guilty, Your Honor.

The fact is that there is a lot of junk produced by knowns, as well as quality work by unknowns. Take book publishing, for instance. At best, a good provenance does not guarantee quality; it only makes it more likely. Sydney Smith was perhaps optimistic when he said that everyone has at least one book in him. But if only a fraction of those books saw the light of day, what riches might appear! In this decade, however, the chances for them grow slimmer every year. The institutionalization of publishing as a branch of the entertainment industry has closed off many of the traditional opportunities for unknown writers. Automatic rejection is the order of the day.

By the way, as an editor I am sometimes subject to the temptation to hand out automatic rejection slips. But for me this temptation is easy to resist. Most submissions to *The Ecphorizer*

come from unknowns—in fact, I encourage such contributions. So I read everything and try to judge it on its merits. If the day ever comes that our typical author appears on the *Times* best-seller list, then maybe I too will start sending out automatic rejection slips. Let's hope that's never.

Urban Stereotyping

Here at the Institute for Minority Stereotyping, we have been conducting many interesting studies of the inherent characteristics of racial, economic, and religious minorities. Unfortunately, none of our results have yet appeared in print because of the media's prejudices against the kind of work we do. Talk about scurrilous innuendo! Nevertheless we are continuing the fight against such ignorance and hope to receive fairer treatment soon.

A breakthrough of sorts has recently taken place, however. Three lawsuits against us were dismissed and the others are on appeal. So we are rushing this article to press before the veil of prejudice drops over our activities once more.

The turning point in our studies occurred when our Department of Regional Quirks came up with the idea of Urban Stereotyping. It is commonly recognized that the inhabitants of the major American conurbations exhibit distinct value structures and behavior systems—that Bostonians, for instance, are different from Los Angelenos. This idea was expressed in America as early as 1925, when the prospectus for the *New Yorker* magazine distanced its readership from "the little old lady in Dubuque"—an urban slur if we ever heard one. Down through the years, whole clusters of urban stereotypes have grown up. Yet the beauty of this data, from a scholarly standpoint, is that it can still be discussed in polite conversation. Thus was a research project born.

Interview teams fanned out across the nation, asking questions and filling out forms. They strove for the broadest possible resource sample by working in bars, military posts, bus stations, and American Legion meetings. The raw data were then analyzed statistically by our computer system. As a result, we have established preliminary stereotypes for six major American cities. These conclusions are presented here for the first time.

New York City. New Yorkers are definitely pushy. And rude. The brutish struggle for existence in their crumbling, bankrupt environment has left them with few, if any, social graces. When invited to a party with free hors d'oeuvres they pig out like animals. They love to cheat out-of-towners, whom they regard as peasants. Their idea of a fun evening is not getting mugged.

Denver. Denverites mostly live in the woods, where they gather wild food during the summer. During the winters they eat granola and worry about whales. They travel about from commune to commune, using skis, kayaks, and bicycles. Most of them have lost touch with reality because of excessive drug consumption. They think trees are more important than people.

Washington, DC. Government people in Washington are drunk with power. They sit around thinking about destroying the world. In quieter moments they design incomprehensible forms for other people to fill out. They are also dishonest. They steal a lot of money and lie to the newspapers. They will do anything to keep their jobs. They think a billion dollars is only slightly more than a million dollars, which they think is hardly anything at all. People in Washington who don't work for the government are inconsequential.

Los Angeles. Los Angelenos drink orange juice to the point of hallucinating. They sit in the sun a lot, sometimes naked. They practice weird religions which require them to give lots of money to crazy Hindus. The men wear open shirts with gold chains and hug each other. Their houses are built on the sides of canyons, overlooking freeways. They bathe in hot tubs and think that sex is a kind of game. When not in a drug-induced coma, they watch television sitcoms.

Boston. Bostonians are all snobs. The rest of the world offends them. They believe that anybody who didn't go to Harvard was poorly educated. They speak nineteenth century English and live in antique houses. They drink a lot of tea. They all have family fortunes which originally came from ship captains who bought and sold slaves. Their streets are dirty because they are too stuck up to clean them. Bostonians think they invented Christianity.

San Francisco. Because the Institute is located in the SF Bay Area, our research on the inhabitants of this city is quite complete. We found San Franciscans to be warm, stimulating, outgoing, and intelligent. Their gay and hippie communities add color to one of the world's most enviable lifestyles. Their cosmopolitan outlook mirrors the best aspects of American culture. Living as they do in the nation's favorite city, San Franciscans are universally happy and self-fulfilled.

Well, that about wraps up our research so far. But we are always busy on new investigations, pushing forward the frontiers of human knowledge. If *Ecphorizer* readers have any insights to add to our findings, we will appreciate hearing from them. Just address the Institute, care of this magazine.

The Case of the Pious Pelican

On a recent visit to Europe, I noticed that an insurance company had adopted as its symbol the old heraldic charge of "a pelican in her piety." This evoked a flood of associations from the days when I fancied an expertise in matters armorial. So on returning here I dug up my notes on the subject, and offer them now.

The charge blazoned as "a pelican in her piety" has been traditionally represented as a bird resembling a cross between an eagle and a phoenix, standing in its nest with neck embowed and wings endorsed and elevated. It is piercing its own breast with a sharp hooked beak. Drops of red blood issue from the wound and fall into the open mouths of the pelican's brood, which are gathered about it. The pelican is said to be "vulning herself."

This peculiar device was not at all uncommon. It is or was borne by the English families of Bigger, Buxton, Chauntrell, Pelham, and Somerset; by Alphonso the Wise (King of Castille, fl. 1252), William of Nassau, Pope Clement IX, and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. It has been described by every heraldic authority from Gerard Leigh to A. C. Fox-Davies. The idea that the female pelican feeds her brood on her own lifeblood has a basis in European mythology; but the fascinating part of her story are the psychological overtones, which I will describe presently.

First, however, we have to trace the pelican myth backward from its incorporation in heraldry to its ultimate source. At the heraldic end, the earlier writers agree that it represents maternal solicitude. Thus we find Guillim (1660), the source of most modern British heraldry, describing "a Pellican in her nest, with wings displayed, feeding of her young ones," borne by Fox, Bishop of Winchester. Similarly, De Vallemont (1701) mentions *"au Pélican, ensanglante avec sa piété"* in the arms of Camus. M. Costa y Turrell, the Spanish herald (1856), notes that *"el pelicano*

se dibuja siempra de frente, las alas estendidas y picandose el pecho para alimenter a sus polluelos." Other examples are recorded in Germany, Switzerland, and Holland. The modern authorities—Boutell, Cussans, Dugdale, Fox-Davies, and de Genoillac—go along, reporting that the pelican in her piety represents parental love and self-sacrifice.

This notion had apparently attained some scientific and literary stature by the seventeenth century. In 1673 the Royal Society published an account of pelicans in Upper Egypt with the observation that "Some will have a Scar in the Breast, from a wound of her own making there, to feed (as is reported) her young with her own bloud, an action which ordinarily suggests devout fancies." Keats has the line "Nurtured like a pelican brood," and in *Hamlet* (1596), Laertes says:

> "To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms;
> And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,
> Repast them with my blood." (IV.5.142-44)

There are similar references in *Richard II* (II.1.126) and *King Lear* (III.4.77).

Where did such a bizarre idea come from? The heraldic system, as it survives today, was not fixed and recorded until the seventeenth century; before that it was transmitted through oral tradition and the practices of the College of Heralds. But the myth that the pelican feeds her young on her own blood goes back at least to classical times, probably farther. The *Dictionary of the British Philological Society* (1905) finds that "it appears to be of Egyptian origin, and to have referred originally to another bird." So let's trace it back a few more centuries.

The most striking change as we proceed back from the seventeenth century is that the pelican becomes a *male* bird. This is suggested by Guillim, who notes that "the Aegyptian priests used the Pellican for a Hieroglyphick to expresse the four duties of a Father toward his children." Similarly, the dictionary compiled by the Académie Française asserts that *"On fait du Pélican le symbole de l'amour* paternel *parce qu'on a cru que cet*

oiseau nourrissait ses petits de son propre sang" (my emphasis). It is worth noting that the name of this bird is a masculine word in the Romance languages.

Even more surprising, however, is that in the earlier versions of the pelican myth the story is no longer one of parental love and self-sacrifice; it is one of infanticide and remorse. A circumstance suddenly emerges that the heraldic writers never mentioned and of which they may indeed have been ignorant—namely, that the pelican *first kills its brood* and then restores them to life with its blood. Vinycomb, in his *Fictitious and Symbolic Creatures in Art* (1906), recognizes this feature in reproducing what seems to him to be the medieval form of the myth, although he still ascribes the act of nurturing to the mother bird:

> "...the pelican is very fond of its brood, but when the young ones begin to grow they rebel against the male bird and provoke his anger, so that he kills them; but the mother returns to the nest in three days, sits on the dead birds, pours her blood over them, and they feed on the blood."

Stith Thompson's definitive *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* lists the pelican story in that form.

Well! Where are you, Freud, now that we need you? Although it didn't enter English literature until 1398 (in an obscure work by Trevisa), what we may now call the "oedipal pelican" was quite active in early Christian iconography. It was taken to be a symbol of Christ; so we see Dante referring to Jesus as *"nostro pelicano,"* and find a similar metaphor in Milton's *Paradise Lost.* This pre-medieval treatment has been preserved by Hervieux in his *Fabulistes Latins,* a corpus of classical fragments:

> *"Ut Pellicanus fit Patris sanguine sanum,*
> *Sic Genus humanum fit Christi sanguine sanum."*
>
> "As the pelican is made whole by its father's blood,
> So mankind is revived through the blood of Christ."

This partly explains the following curious passage in Skelton's *Armory of Birds* (1510):

"Then sayd the pellycane
When my byrdts be slayne
With my bloud I them revyve
Scrypture doth record,
The same dyd our Lord,
And rose from deth to lyve."

Returning once more to Hervieux's collection, we are fortunate to find there what was probably the original Greco-Roman form of the pelican myth:

> *"Pellicanus, quando pulli sui erigunt rostrum et picant contra ipsum, interficit eos. Postea, cum videt pullos suos mortuos, pietate motus, extrahit sanguinem de latere et super filios suos regurgit, et reviviscunt."*
>
> "The [male] pelican, when his [male] young unsheathe their beaks and begin to peck him, kills them. Afterwards, as he sees his dead brood, moved by piety, he draws forth blood from his side and sprinkles it over his young, and they revive."

So this is where the idea of the self-sacrificing "pelican in her piety" came from—as raw a tale of family violence as one could dredge up from the collective id of western civilization. It had to be sanitized into its modern form before the good Bishop of Winchester could decently adopt it in his coat of arms. As a symbol of maternal solicitude, I suppose it makes a good logo for an insurance company: we'll take care of you with our lifeblood. But one wonders whether they know how the pelican story originated and what it really means.

World War Theory

Back in the twentieth century, when they were first recognized, world wars were thought to be a novelty. The war of 1914-1918 was at first called the "Great War" and "The War To End War" in the naïve belief that it was a unique, unrepeatable event. Twenty-five years later it was renamed "World War I," to distinguish it from the 1939-1945 war, which became "World War II."

After the third and fourth world wars, scholars began to realize that civilization was in the grip of a cyclical pattern of history. Historians searched their archives and identified world wars prior to 1914, giving them new names and numbers. Thus the former Napoleonic Wars became "World War 0," the former Seven Years' War was dubbed "World War –I," and so on.

But it was not until the last century that historians gained enough perspective to start enunciating a General Theory of World Wars. Professor Black's *Law of Alternation* was the first great breakthrough. In its simplest form it states that *even-numbered world wars arise from appeasement policies; odd-numbered world wars arise from arms build-ups.* After this simple truth had been established, the general study of world wars became a flourishing scholarly discipline.

Although recently modified in some of its details, the Law of Alternation has remained the cornerstone of World War studies. To show the similarity between the origins of World Wars I and III, for example, modern textbooks display elaborate parallel tables that compare the massing of troops along borders in 1914 with the climactic deployment of "smart missiles" in 1998. World Wars II and 0 are compared by printing side-by-side depictions of Neville Chamberlain at Munich in 1938 and Czar Alexander at Tilsit in 1807, noting even such details as the fact that Alexander's sword measured exactly the same length as Chamberlain's umbrella.

The next breakthrough was Grimsby's *Principle of Retrospective Weaponry.* By applying the Law of Alternation to the old maxim that "generals are always prepared to fight the last war," Grimsby realized that *the weapons developed just before each World War are designed to overcome the problems that started the last one.* Thus the great cannons of 1914 were created with a view to destroying Napoleon's cavalry. The bomber aircraft of 1939 were intended to fly over the cannons of 1914. The missiles of 1998 were designed to outrace the bombers of 1939. And so on. As a corollary, the designers of such weapons always expressed confidence in a "clean, quick victory." Of course we now know that such a result is inherently unattainable.

The more recent world wars will be too familiar to the reader to warrant review. But it is instructive to recall some of the earlier ones. World War III was important mainly because it resulted in the Nuclear Ban. Although large areas of Siberia and North Dakota were made uninhabitable, it was otherwise short and uninteresting. World War IV provided a classic example of an even-numbered conflict obeying the Law of Alternation; it started when North Europia caved in under the demands of New Muslimistan and agreed to the partition of London. It featured the first use of genetic weaponry and ended with the development of the famous "victory virus," which was vectored to the brains of Arabic speakers.

The build-up of psychokinetic weapons before World War V led to the inevitable trial of strength, in which Tibet played such a pivotal role. Afterwards, the overflowing mental hospitals provided a grim reminder of the evils of armed conflict. This is why the Calmex Confederation lacked the courage to stand up to Greater Japania, and so World War VI was launched...

But all this is merely ancient history. What does it teach us today? An early philosopher said that those who cannot remember history are forced to repeat it. We have, by the grace of Zork, survived World War XXXVIII. Let us not forget that it started when we cravenly allowed the Mediterranea Bloc to violate their treaties with impunity. Now, I regret to say, another

arms build-up has begun. The godless Stralians are stockpiling spears and arrows. We hear reports of infernal wind-up machines designed to hurl great stones down upon our unprotected tents. All we can do is reply in kind. Our Leader has exhorted us to double our axe production by the end of the year. We will respond with enthusiasm, for it is clearly our duty and destiny to save mankind from the horrors of Stralian rule. But I greatly fear that the seeds of World War XXXIX are already sprouting within our scarred and weary earth.

The Trivialization of Armageddon

I believe that the recent much-ballyhooed showing of the television "docudrama" *The Day After* [portraying the result of all-out nuclear war] launched a process that may ultimately increase the chances of a nuclear holocaust. This is the process by which frightening possibilities that we cannot avoid are made familiar, and ultimately trivial, by being converted into entertainment.

Every society evolves ways of dealing with ineluctable tragedies —death, disease, hunger, war, crime, and so on. People can treat the disasters of life as problems to be solved, celebrating their victories over them and bearing up under their losses; or they can sweep them under the rug as taboo in speech and action; or they can convert them into trivial forms, which are no longer painful to contemplate.

A good example of the head-on approach is our attitude toward disease and hunger. These problems seem, at least in theory, to be solvable; so we continue to work on them, talk about them, and treat them as serious. Death, on the other hand, is unavoidable. We can't do anything about it, so we stop talking about it. More than that, we make talking about it taboo—or, in a less anthropological context, bad taste. Why clutter up our lives with useless hand wringing?

The third approach, trivialization, works best when a problem touches only part of the community. Then the majority can safely contemplate it as nonthreatening. Crime is a good example. As long as the police are working effectively, so that "criminals" are a stereotypic minority, the problem can be presented as good old cops-and-robbers. The bad guys, who wear loud suits and live in night clubs, snarl menacingly at each other and ultimately wind up shooting it out with the cops on a deserted rooftop. When plugged (their invariable fate), they clutch their midsections and

silently drop to the ground, from whence they can be cleanly removed to unmarked graves. None of the nastiness (spouting blood, piteous screams, entrails dragging on the ground) that actually occurs when one person kills another is shown. We combine good entertainment with the feeling that another social problem is under control.

Our attitude toward nuclear Armageddon has exhibited both the problem solving and the taboo phases. We have grappled with disarmament proposals, and we have tried to bury the problem in the jargon of "low-yield devices" and "delivery systems." Now we appear to be ready to try out the trivialization approach. While the ostensive purpose of *The Day After* was to put new life into our efforts at problem solving, its actual effect was to introduce the idea that maybe the holocaust would make good TV material. If we just trim off the nasty parts—such as people vomiting to death from radiation sickness or killing each other over the last unopened can of tuna—we could call the remainder entertainment.

The TV biz, always voracious for new subjects, will be quick to catch on. The start will probably be fairly serious:

> 8 pm: *Little Fallout Shelter on the Prairie.* When John's hair falls out, Ellen makes him a wig out of shredded paper; and Susie falls in love with a boy who was temporarily blinded by the flash.

But once the stereotypes have been established and After The Bomb has become a new genre in American fiction, can the sitcom be far behind?

> 7 pm: *My Favorite Mutant.* Googie's ability to digest liquid soap comes in handy when he gets locked in the rest room of an abandoned gas station.

The difficulty with all of this, of course, is that a problem doesn't disappear just because it has been trivialized; in fact, it usually gets worse. Again, crime is a good example. Violence didn't become an accepted part of the big-city street environment until it had been made commonplace on the TV screen. People have a

hard time distinguishing between the original human tragedy, which continues and grows, and the sanitized version fed to them by the marketers of "entertainment." Since the sanitized version needs no fixing, they put less energy into the reality.

I am afraid. I am afraid that we are going to stop trying to solve the problem of nuclear stockpiling and turn it into a TV game. This will be fine as long as those ugly machines in Siberia and North Dakota stay in their holes. But as the Big Boom becomes more and more familiar, the likelihood increases that some addled politician will try it out. (Why not? Last night on the tube it almost looked like fun). Then we will all get a bigger dose of reality than anybody wants.

Perhaps it would help if someone would point out that in a nuclear holocaust, the electromagnetic pulse will destroy all TV sets first. This should generate a degree of terror in certain circles that no contemplation of megadeaths or radiation levels ever could.

A Climber's Guide to the Swiss Alps

Mountain climbing is jolly good fun, and certainly a sport at which every stout-hearted fellow should have a go. It combines bracing exercise in the clean outdoor air with the satisfaction of having planted the flag at the top. Afterwards, the climber can sit down to his tea with the feeling of a job well done.

For you chaps who can't manage a trip to the Himalayas or East Africa, the Swiss Alps offer some splendid climbing opportunities closer to home. So I have jotted down a few notes here, which you may find rather helpful. Although there are several jolly mountains in Switzerland, the customary ones are Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. Neither of them is exceptionally difficult to climb if you go about it properly.

Mont Blanc. The "White Mountain," as it is called by the natives, is approached through the village of Chamonix. You will need a goodly quantity of *francs* (the local currency) with which to barter for the supplies necessary for your assault on the peak. These can be exchanged for *billets de téléphérique* at the "ticket office" in the village. Do not commit the error of the ill-equipped Mexican expedition of 1982, whose *pesos* failed them during the final dash to the cashier's window. With your *billets* firmly gripped, negotiate the (Grade 3) slope leading up to the cable car and secure yourselves inside. This completes the first stage of the climb.

Exit the cable car at the *Aiguille du Midi* (3842 meters) and proceed immediately westward. Although the *col* is steep at this point you should not find it necessary to drive in pitons, as the flight of steps leading to the restaurant may be used for the climb. An alternative route, passing just south of the coin-operated telescopes and along a ridge to the eastern corner of the dining terrace, was explored by Whitcombe's expedition of 1963 but is not recommended because of frequent ice build-up on the handrails. You may either bivouac here for rest and refitting (*prix*

fixé menu, F45) or, if you feel in top form, you can mount your dash to the top. The *ascenseur* marks the most direct route, although the more sporting may prefer the stairs. Either way, when you make your final rappel onto the observation platform you will enjoy the feeling of those who have striven and conquered in the face of raw nature.

The Matterhorn. Once an object of awe and native superstition, this magnificent mountain has finally yielded to man's skill. Following such courageous pioneers as Edward Whymper and Thomas Cook, the modern practice is to set up one's Base Camp at Zermatt (Hôtel Heftig Preis). With fair weather and the proper credit cards, make the (Grade 2) trek to the cog railway station, where more *francs* can be used to advantage. This will carry one to the Gornergrat station, where shelter can be found to establish one's High Camp.

The traverse to the souvenir shop, first explored in 1955 by Joe and Ethel Sculby of Ohio, USA, can now be executed without difficulty, thanks to the mapping efforts of Sir Reginald Whiteby. The preferred route to the summit passes just north of the "Golden Arches," bending to the west at the corner of the disco. From the platform one can view a panorama of the Alps, including fine prospects of the "Roof O' The World" Hotel and the Matterhorn Golf Club. Truly a fitting climax to this challenging adventure!

In this all-too-brief *memoire* I have tried to convey some of the beauty and excitement to be found in climbing the Swiss Alps, as well as practical tips to guide the mountaineer. Obviously, there is no time like the present to get cracking on your expedition. As a matter of fact, in view of the plans to sell the Swiss Alps to Warner Communications and move them to Arizona, I would say there is not a moment to lose.

Mensa Pastiches

The popular press tends to assert several fixed ideas about Mensa. One is that the society is populated by egocentrics who spend their time telling each other how smart they are; another is that Mensa members typically lack commonsense skills —"they think they're smart, but look at the stupid things they do." Neither of these preconceptions squares with my 25 years experience in Mensa. At a Mensa party your high IQ is only average, so there is no payoff in talking about it; and the members seem to cope with life about as well as any other group.

Mensa members are good at processing information; they like to talk and they like to learn. This makes for good parties. Attempts to engage Mensa in other activities, such as problem solving, have never thrived. But the members enjoy getting together, with or without a preset topic, just to kick the intellectual ball around. Because intelligence is their only common ground, Mensans vary widely in values and lifestyles. My acquaintances in the club have run from prostitutes and prison inmates to ministers and bankers. You can never tell who you'll run into at a Mensa party, but you know you'll be able to communicate with whoever you meet.

Mensa has a fairly simple organization. There is an international office in London and a U.S. office in Austin, TX, as well as a local chapter that serves the San Francisco Bay Area through an elected Local Secretary, or "LocSec." This structure has three basic duties: to attract and qualify new members, maintain the membership list, and publish newsletters that help Mensans get in touch with one another. The club throws a few parties itself, but most activities comes from the members. Save occasional political cat fights, the club functions fairly well.

San Francisco Mensa early acquired a reputation for California values. Lurid stories circulated about wine orgies and nude hot-tub parties. Fortunately, these stories were all true. In 1965, San Francisco Mensa pioneered the idea of the "regional gathering," or RG, where a few hundred members would take over a resort for a weekend of games and parties. Ours used to happen every Labor Day weekend at the Asilomar conference grounds in Pacific Grove.

When I edited *The Ecphorizer* it was natural for me to poke fun at Mensa, particularly at the image of the San Francisco group. The results are in the following pages. Several of these pastiches are *romans à clef*, in which characters' names are adapted from members I know. For example, you'll find the name of Margo Seitelman, late executive director of the national office, in several guises. Others are basically exercises in writing style, using Mensa as a hook. All these pieces were written primarily for frivolous entertainment. ❖

Mensa News From All Over

Note: When I was Local Secretary of the San Francisco group, I received notices of Mensa meetings from all over the U.S. They inspired the following pastiche, imagining what these gatherings might be like in other lands. ❖

From the *Menaklubinformationsblatt,* Duckelstatt, Germany: "The regular Monthly Gathering was held Friday evening at 2023 hours, in the Official Meeting Hall. The membership, seated alphabetically, heard an address by Privatdozent Herr Doktor R. Schulz on the subject of 'How to Raise Your IQ Through Order and Discipline.' During the 27 minutes allowed for discussion, a total of 16 questions were raised and answered. The membership filed out at 2152 hours."

An item in the current *Cahiers du Mensa,* Caneton-sur-Oise, France: "The Cheese SIG met again last week, for a discussion, comparison, and tasting of camemberts. Three members were fined for bringing cheeses that were too firm. Complementing the subject under examination was a new Beaujolais from the *Département du Rhône,* fresh and innocent but conveying a hint of sensuous abandon. After a preliminary tasting session, the meeting was recessed three hours for lunch and rest. Upon reconvening, the assemblage consumed the remainder of the samples and voted 'Abbye de la Bonne Vache' their Cheese of the Month. The meeting was then adjourned for dinner."

A friend forwarded this notice from the *Poonagunj Mensa Gazette* of India: "About 400 members showed up at V. Mokhtal's apartment Sunday to hear an address by The Honorable Sri M. Moghuljee entitled 'Famous People Who Have Spoken To Me and What I Told Them.' The three-hour talk was well received, after which refreshments were served consisting of Madam Mokhtal's illustrious paprika cookies and curdled goat's milk. Another meeting is being planned after the monsoon season."

The latest from *Il Corriere della Mensa,* Villanitra, Italy: The Friends and Relations of Mensa held their annual picnic at the farm of the Luigi Mezzarolla family, near Pizzanapoli. We are happy to report 17 new babies since last year's event. Nine members have returned from America, six of whom are unmarried men. Get busy, Mensa mamas! As usual, there was lots of singing, laughing, and crying as old friends met once more. Mama Seitelini's *spaghettello pomodoro* was a hit, as always, and the dancing and drinking went on till dawn."

Here is news from the *Quangzhou Mensa People's Monthly* of China: "The regular meeting of all members took place on the 15th at the Down With Running Dogs Community Hall. Among important matters discussed were the need to purify the letters column of the *Monthly* from reactionary arguments, and the implementation of the People's Seven Progressive Actions Plan. The Local Secretary presented a short self-criticism, after which all the comrades present demonstrated their hatred of bourgeois imperialist decadence by burning a home computer."

The *West Country Mensa Scheduler* of Eiderhampton, England, reports: "Our last monthly meeting included an exceedingly interesting talk by Marjorie Tweedworth on 'Making Your Own Sensible Flannel Underclothing.' It is a pity we had decided to hold it in Bogsmere Park, as the weather, even in August, can be a bit iffy, and the freezing rain did dampen things a bit. But we soon repaired to Colonel Bagshott's cottage for a nice cup of tea, and when all was said and done a jolly time was had by everybody."

We received this notice from the *Nippon Mensa Shimbun* of Yokusaki, Japan: "Honored members gathered at the Ancient Lotus Meeting Hall to hear an address from the venerable K. Nakayama about how the contemplation of dried bamboo leaves can diminish antisocial tendencies. Our Local Secretary humbled himself for having provided insufficient rice cakes at the last meeting. We finished the evening by observing the moon rise over the Yokusaki Steel Works."

Finally, from the *Lotus Valley Mensa Sharing and Caring* of Southern California comes this note: "We had a warm and wonderful drug tasting last month, at which everybody opened their hearts and their stashes. There were no overdoses this time, so we were able to concentrate on sharing a very mellow space. After all our minds had been freed from reality we took off our clothes and played video games."

The Adventure of the Mensa Society

Of the many cases in which I have participated with my friend, Mr Sherlock Holmes, some are by their nature impossible to discuss at this time. My notes for these affairs, in which are mentioned some of the most honorable names in the Kingdom, must lie forever at the bottom of my dispatch box. Other cases, available to public scrutiny without such reservations, are too technical for these pages. Although perhaps of interest to the specialist in criminal detection, they do not reward the casual reader.

In one instance, however, my friend's energies were employed in unravelling a puzzle so bizarre, and yet so amenable to his peculiar talents, that it warrants public narration. While the events are still fresh in my mind, I hasten to place them in print.

My notes reveal that it was just at dusk on a late October evening that the first intimation of this affair reached our lodgings at 221b Baker Street. The afternoon post had brought a note from our longtime colleague on the official police force, Inspector Lestrade:

> I would appreciate your views on a matter that is perhaps inconsequential. Will it be convenient if I call at six?

"Hah, Watson!" cried Holmes, his keen eyes glittering, "Our friend is out of his depth. 'Perhaps inconsequential'—that means he cannot make head nor tail of it. Posted in a hurry, too, else he would have licked the whole stamp." Holmes held the envelope to his nose. "There's a woman involved, and one with a sophisticated taste in perfume. I believe we are in for a treat. But here is the man now to tell us for himself." Holmes had turned to face the bow window as a four-wheeler pulled up below. "Hum... He's been to Oxshott today, if I'm not mistaken—that peculiar bluish clay on his boots says as much. Do pull another chair around, Watson, and turn up the lamp."

A minute later the small, dapper figure of Lestrade appeared in our doorway. "Well, well," chaffed Homes amiably as the inspector struggled out of his overcoat, "Tell us now what the lady in Oxshott said that sent you so precipitously to us."

"It seems to me that you know so much already, there's not much point in my saying anything," replied Lestrade with some asperity. "Yes, it was a lady in Oxshott that brought this whole business to a head. As mixed-up a string of events as I've ever seen. But come now, I'm talking to the famous Mr Holmes; I suppose you've already figured it out?" The inspector shot a crafty look at my companion.

"There now," Holmes countered serenely, "I may see deeper than most but I'm not omniscient. Suppose you tell us exactly what's going on."

Lestrade perched on the edge of our leather easy chair and knitted his brows in concentration. "Well," he began, "It all started with our receiving reports about the Mensa society. They're an odd group, you know, who believe they've found a way to test intelligence. Bunch of high-flying foolishness, if you ask me."

"I daresay from an official point of view, anything having to do with intelligence must seem out of place," observed Holmes drily. He reached down a volume of his commonplace books from the shelf. "Let me see... Murderers, Moriarty, Milverton of odious memory... ah, here we are. 'Mensa: A secret society, open only to its members, who are selected by means of recondite tests. Reputed to indulge in wine parties and discussions that end in unrestrained brawls.' Hmm... Chapters in America... Internal Political Dissension... Hot-Tub Cults in California... Indeed! So in what way have these unsavory Mensa persons attracted the notice of Scotland Yard?"

Lestrade cleared his throat. "It apparently started when the lady in Oxshott—an unmarried schoolteacher, she is, by the name of Bletherington—joined the society and went to one of their meetings. There were a number of single young men in

attendance and she, being unattached, struck up a conversation with one of them. One thing led to another, with the result that he offered to escort her to the local Guildhall Ball a fortnight later. She insists that his conduct was perfectly proper, and that at no time did he give her cause to question his intentions."

"And that meeting took place...?"

"Just sixteen days ago." Holmes made a note on his cuff.

"When the appointed evening arrived, he called for her in a Hansom cab, and she thought herself fortunate to be in the company of a young man of some means. On the way to the Guildhall, however, he suddenly became extremely agitated. Muttering something incomprehensible, he flung open the door of the cab and leapt into the street. Before she could order the driver to stop, he had disappeared into the early evening crowd. She has not seen him since."

"And so Scotland Yard has been called upon to restore this broken romance? Surely this is not the reason you've come all of a hurry to see me," Holmes expostulated.

"Of course not," replied Lestrade. "In his haste, the young man left an envelope on the seat of the cab. And in that envelope was this." He drew from his inner jacket pocket a sheet of light yellow paper, folded in three, and handed it to Holmes. My companion drew forth his most powerful lens, subjected the back of the paper to minute scrutiny, and then opened it and spread it on his knee.

"The paper's been refolded several times—witness the broken fibers at the crease. It appears to be some sort of code. 'Egg is to chicken as acorn is to ??' '4 9 16 25 ??' The double question marks are, in my experience, unique. What do you make of it, Lestrade?"

"Deviltry, Holmes, deviltry. We've found the same sort of thing before when dealing with the Mensa society, but none of them will tell us what it means. Miss Bletherington was naturally alarmed when she saw that her young man was carrying some sort of secret writing and so she quite properly came to us."

My companion leaned back and placed the tips of his fingers together. "These may well be deep waters, Lestrade. But as the lady has emerged from her experience unharmed, I don't see that vigorous action is called for. Still, there are few things about this writing that I find remarkable..."

What Holmes found remarkable must forever remain unknown, for at that instant our door was flung open and a young lady burst in upon us. She was fashionably but modestly dressed, with a light fur piece about her neck as protection against the fall weather. She addressed Lestrade in a state of considerable agitation.

"Oh, Inspector, I don't know what to do. You must help me!"

"Miss Bletherington, I believe," remarked Holmes imperturbably. "Pray take a chair and tell us what new drama has come into your life."

"Ah, you must be Mr Holmes," she replied. "Yes, I am Priscilla Bletherington of Oxshott. You must know that two days ago I was cruelly abandoned in the High Road by a young man who had invited me to the Guildhall Ball. Today I was accosted by that same man as I left the greengrocer's shop. He demanded of me 'the yellow paper'—that very document I now see in your hand. When I told him I didn't have it he became quite odious. 'You've no right to keep it,' he said. 'It's ours.' He threatened to have his friends call upon me if I didn't give it back. What am I to do?" She buried her head in her hands.

"There, there," said Holmes in that peculiarly soothing tone he found most effective with distraught clients. "I must give the matter some thought, but I see no reason why we cannot disperse the clouds that bother you. Meanwhile, do you return to your home and shut yourself in. I'll be in touch with you presently." Signaling Lestrade to support her arm, he escorted them both to the door.

That evening I tried to interest myself in a novel, but the image of our client's troubled face kept floating before my eyes. Holmes, meanwhile, curled himself up in his easy chair and

smoked pipe after pipe of shag tobacco until the atmosphere in our sitting room was fairly blue with the fumes. He had remained motionless for four hours or more when I finally gave it up and went off to bed.

Dawn had hardly broken outside the windows when I was nudged awake by Holmes standing at my bedside. "Watson, you may call me the biggest fool in London. The answer was so obvious, yet it took me all night and a dozen pipes to fathom it."

"You have the solution, then?" I cried.

"Yes, by Jove. By this evening all will be revealed and Miss Bletherington will have nothing more to fear. I am going out now to set my plans in motion. I'll be back after breakfast."

All day, Holmes paced our little flat like a caged tiger. Every hour the page boy, Billy, brought in the latest editions of the newspapers. Holmes scanned them briefly, then threw them into a growing pile in the corner.

"I've placed ads in all the dailies. It should bring them around. Listen to this: 'If the person or persons who lost a yellow document in the Oxshott High Road will call at 221b Baker Street, his property will be restored.' What do you think?"

"Seems to me the young man might be suspicious," I ventured. "How is he to know you don't represent the police?"

"It's a risk he must take, Watson. As I analyze the situation, he is desperate to get this back."

Even as Holmes picked up the mysterious yellow code sheet to examine it again, there was a knock on our door. Holmes went to open it, as I stood by with the fire poker in my hand. A young man, evidently the late companion of Miss Bletherington, sidled into the room.

"I've come for that," he said, indicating the document. "Just let me have it and I'll not bother you further."

"Not so fast," exclaimed Holmes firmly. "Is it not true that egg is to chicken as acorn is to oak? And that the next number in the

sequence 4 9 16 25 is 36? I deduce, therefore, that you are a Mensa Proctor. Come now, the game is up!"

The young man turned pale, staggered, and nearly fell. "It's only a bit of fun, Governor," he protested. "We don't mean nothing by it."

"Your bit of fun has seriously upset a delicate young lady. Have you considered the feelings of Miss Bletherington? You left her alone in a carriage on a public street while you thoughtlessly bolted out to try to recruit a new member into your wretched Mensa society. Is that your idea of 'meaning nothing'?"

"You're right, Sir," the young man exclaimed, his face red with contrition, "although how you come to know these things I cannot imagine. Yes, I am indeed a Proctor for the East London Mensa group. But now that I've lost the Qualification Test, there's no telling what will become of us. We've never faced a crisis like this before."

Holmes thought deeply for several minutes. Finally he flung the door open and handed the yellow paper to the grateful young man. "It's damnable," he growled, "but not actionable. I'll let you go against your promise never to bother decent folk like Miss Bletherington again!"

"Oh, yes, Sir!" cried the youth, as he clutched the document to his breast and bolted down the stairs. We could hear his fleeing footsteps the length of Baker street.

"A bad business, Watson," remarked Holmes after some reflection. "The Mensa society will descend from petty outrages such as this down to blatant rascality. I foresee no good coming of it. Meanwhile, however, we may have the satisfaction of sending a telegram to Oxshott to assure at least one decent lady that she is free of their attentions."

"And Lestrade will be able to close another case," I added.

"Yes, he'll get the glory for this one," Holmes observed with a shrug. "But I very much doubt that it's the last time the Police will hear about Mensa."

The Clan of the Hot Tub

I tell a tale from the early days of humankind—before written history, before civilization, before *Dynasty* and Froot Loops. The earth was different then. Where today there are cities and highways, there were then great glaciers, grinding the land underneath their inexorable march southward. Beyond the edges of the glaciers, the world was dangerous and unstable. Great earthquakes toppled the forests; volcanoes thrust up without warning; floods and tornadoes scoured the earth.

Gigantic beasts roamed the plains—the woolly mammoth with its tusks thirty feet long, the ravenous sabre-toothed tiger, the famous cave bear. The ground shook where they walked, and at night the forests rang with their cries.

But there were smaller and gentler creatures as well. The first horse, *eohippus,* no larger than a modern dog. The swift and timid antelope. The rabbit, the pig, and the hairy armadillo. They climbed the trees or hid among the rocks; and when they ventured forth, they ran in zigzags from bush to bush across the unprotected grasslands.

Now, among these gentler creatures none were more remarkable than the apes that dwelt in caves. Unlike other apes they walked nearly upright, stooping only occasionally to balance themselves on their knuckles. Their hands were no longer flat; they curled around to grasp the tools that they made. Their grunts and cries had become modulated, complex, precise. They banded together in small family clans, with leaders, vice-presidents, and production supervisors. They were the first human beings.

They had learned the use of Fire, these early men, and they used it to warm their caves as the winter sun sank below the mountain peaks. Seated in a ring around the life-giving flames, they naturally began to trade stories. They talked of daily events, of the hunt and hunting heroes, of spirits and magic and tax

shelters. Listen! Even now the Old One is beginning to speak. In a voice soft with age, he is telling once again this ancient legend...

* * *

Lok-sek stood on the brow of the hill, sniffing the air to the south. Soon rain would come. As leader of his clan, it was his duty to make sure that the rain was carefully collected in leaves, so that the hot tubs could once more be filled with fresh, pure water.

His was the clan of the Men-Sa, the "People of the Top," who dwelt in the mountains. They alone held the precious secret of the hot tubs—the art of constructing and heating great wooden basins in which the whole clan could bathe, relax, and talk. It set them apart from all the other cave apes. With their hot tubs, the Men-Sa had gained the respect and envy of all—particularly of the cave apes that lived in the valley, whose hairy skins never touched warm water from one season to another.

Lok-Sek's flat nostrils distended, taking in the gamy odor that arose from the valley below. Yes, he thought, it is better to cleanse the skin. We are indeed fortunate, we Men-Sa. But as he stood there in the sunlight, his eyes picked out a figure hurrying up the hill. It was one of his clan: Booz-Sig the party giver, in whose corner of the cave one could always find the biggest fire and the warmest hot tub. Today, however, it was clear that Booz-Sig was not in a party mood. Lines of worry creased his sloping brow as he toiled up the hill toward Lok-Sek.

Gaining the crest of the hill, Booz-Sig held up a bright yellow pebble in the universal sign of recognition among the Men-Sa. Still out of breath, he hurried to Lok-Sek and acknowledged his fealty by rubbing his nose in the leader's shadow. Then he spoke.

"A new people are coming," he gasped. "They are already below us. They come from a valley called Sil-Con. They do not admit our superiority." And then in a whisper he added, "They carry a

great new magic with them." His yellow eyes were wide with fear.

Lok-Sek was puzzled. What new magic could there possibly be? Did not the Men-Sa already know the secret of fire and the hot tub, as well as the recipe for White Zinfandel? Surely they could teach these upstarts from Sil-Con a thing or two! But something in Booz-Sig's expression made him unsure. He'd better call a Gathering of the Clan. Motioning Booz-Sig to follow, Lok-Sek hurried toward the Big Cave.

Soon all the Men-Sa were gathered inside, drinking and arguing as was their wont. One of the last to arrive was Ra-Kel, the beautiful young daughter of Pol-Tic, the troublemaker. For some time now, Lok-Sek had wanted to mate with Ra-Kel; but every time he approached her he was cut off by Ter-Kee the hunter. Ter-Kee, who had many mammoth kills to his credit, had convinced her that Lok-Sek was not worthy until he had at least speared a musk ox. Even now, when every man in the clan was obliged to concentrate on the current emergency, Ter-Kee was running his grimy hands over Ra-Kel's wolfskin and drooling in her hair. Lok-Sek made a mental note to throw Ter-Kee over a cliff after the meeting. But now there was business to conduct. He sprang upon a boulder and addressed the clan.

"Booz-Sig has a vital report," he cried. "Listen to him!" The clan fell silent and turned toward Booz-Sig.

"Yea, I have seen it with my own eyes," quavered Booz-Sig. "I have seen the magic of the Sil-Con people. They carry boxes with windows in them, and when they look into the windows the Gods speak to them!" A murmur of fear ran through the crowd.

"There is more," he continued. "Although they look and talk like us, the Sil-Con have learned how to control the nether Gods. I heard one of them call upon Mega-Byte, and another invoked the name of Sof-Ware. They fill me with fear."

"Point of order," shouted Pol-Tic, with his usual penchant for parliamentary tricks. "How do we know that Booz-Sig is not lying to us? Has anyone else seen this so-called magic?"

"I have," replied Ter-Kee. He momentarily released Ra-Kel, who wriggled away gratefully into the crowd. "I too just came from the valley and saw the new clan. I know that they call themselves the people of Hak-Ker, and that their leader is called Nerd. Yes, they possess the magic of which Booz-Sig speaks."

At this point confusion broke out in the meeting. Some wanted to descend immediately into the valley with spears and clubs. Others insisted that the whole clan should flee higher into the mountains, even though it meant abandoning the caves and hunting grounds that they knew. Still others suggested that they all just climb into their hot tubs and hope for the best. Lok-Sek shouted for order, but he knew that he had no chance once the Men-Sa got to arguing.

The spears-into-the-valley contingent was just beginning to gain a decision, when the mouth of the cave was suddenly darkened by a horde of men. Total silence swept the room.

"I am Nerd, leader of the Hak-Ker!" With a shout, the tallest of the newcomers strode confidently to the center. He carried under his arm a curiously shaped box that glowed with an eerie inner light. "I bring you the wisdom of Sof-Ware," he declared, glaring at the Men-Sa.

"And I am Lok-Sek, leader of the Men-Sa!" From atop his boulder, Lok-Sek looked down upon the arrogant Hak-Ker and upon his own clan, now immobilized with fear. "You bring new magic, but ours is older and stronger." He expressed a confidence he didn't really feel.

"Behold," cried Nerd, fiddling with his glowing box and staring into its insides. "My magic tells me that your hot tubs each contain as many deerskins of water as there are stones around your central firepit, and that the temperature of the water is the same as that of the blood of a freshly killed warthog."

"Aeiii, all he says is true!" wailed Ed-Tor, the oldest of the Men-Sa and the one who kept their secret knowledge. "I know it myself. But no one could have told him this. His magic must truly be the voice of the Gods!"

For a moment, Lok-Sek wavered. Was there any point in fighting against a force such as this? But he had not become leader of the clan by giving in. He pulled together the last of his strength and hurled a challenge at the Hak-Ker. "Let us have a test of strength, then," he shouted. "Bring your magic together with ours, and we shall see which is the stronger!" The assembled crowd, Men-Sa and Hak-Ker alike, murmured approval.

Although Nerd sensed a trap, he was forced to agree. As everyone pressed closer to watch the outcome, he slowly carried his magic box over to the hot tub. Not a word was spoken—indeed, scarcely a breath could be heard in the cave—as he lowered his magic box into the warm water. For a brief second it glowed more brightly, and Lok-Sek's heart was chilled by a certainty that all was lost. But then the box hissed gently and went dark, its magic buried forever in the power of the primal sea.

The Gods of Sof-Ware had deserted the Hak-Ker.

* * *

Later, as the Hak-Ker joined the Men-Sa in their hot tubs and Ed-Tor began to explain to the newcomers the secret of White Zinfandel, Lok-Sek felt a soft wet hand steal into his. It was Ra-Kel.

"Overcoming Nerd was braver than spearing any number of silly mammoths," she simpered, snuggling up to him. "I've told Ter-Kee to go take a hike."

* * *

Now the fire burns low, as the Old One finishes his tale. It is dark outside and snowflakes are beginning to fall. One by one, the listeners disperse to their blankets for the night. But they will not soon forget the brave Ancient Days, when Lok-Sek defeated Nerd and preserved for his children and his children's children the ways of the Clan of the Hot Tub.

The Mensan Who Came In from the RG

The Director of Intelligent Activities, IQ-2, glared at the telegram that had just arrived over the super-scrambler from Mensa headquarters. Under the red stamps that proclaimed it MOST SECRET were two short but chilling sentences:

Egg Salad blown. Celery arrested.

So the other side had uncovered Egg Salad! Two years of the finest undercover work, building up a network of high-intelligence agents, lay in ruins. And Celery, whose energy and brilliance had made it possible, was even now sweating under the none-too-subtle interrogation procedures of the dreaded Office of Stupidity. IQ-2 shuddered as he visualized Celery's reactions when the television sitcoms began to take effect. He reached for the intercom button beside his desk.

"Miss Margopenny, would you see if you can reach 0098? Try all the RG hospitality suites until you contact him. Then get him here."

Half a world away, 0098 was folding his lean, six-foot-two-inch frame into an armchair near the bar. His bronzed face bore the scars of his profession. It did not, however, betray his status: one of the top two percent, licensed to argue any subject to death. Languidly, he picked up a bottle and poured it for the blonde across the table.

"Chateau Asilomar '65—an early year, but I think you'll enjoy its uncomplicated structure," he smiled. His companion nodded, her golden hair cascading over her bare shoulders. He could tell from the way she crossed and uncrossed her legs that she would soon grow tired of the RG chitchat and suggest more secluded surroundings.

Suddenly he felt a tingling at his wrist. He glanced imperceptibly at the tiny glowing jewel on his watch, now pulsing rapidly. Damn! Work had a way of intruding at the most unfortunate moments. He excused himself and found a telephone. Margopenny was sympathetic but adamant. Blonde or no blonde, there was a helicopter waiting for him just beyond the hot tub area. Was there a note of triumph in her voice? No time to analyze that now. He blew a kiss toward the table he had just left and sprinted out the back door.

"The problem," explained IQ-2, "is that we're missing an essential document. It contains the bylaws of our second-largest network. Celery was supposed to deliver it to National. But now that he's taken...." IQ-2 paused to let 0098 appreciate the gravity of the situation. Then he continued. "His last contact was with their LocSec. Here's our file on her." He handed 0098 a manila folder marked MENSA EYES ONLY.

Once outside IQ-2's office, 0098 opened the file. It contained only a photo and a coded biographical entry:

Beaucoup, Brayni—F 08.12.65 P A 0 B 030 N97 Q26

The photo was full length. It showed a slim but voluptuous body, dark hair halfway down her back, large melting eyes. A quick look in the newsletter files told him that she was hosting a gathering that evening. It was as good a starting place as any.

But first, he had to check in with the laboratory. The chief always showed him around personally. "Please pay attention, 0098," warned the white coated scientist, in his usual flat tone. "Each of these jacket buttons has a trivia question micro-engraved on the back. They're very difficult, so use them only as a last resort. Now look carefully at this ball point pen; it contains a five-megabyte computer with fully integrated software and a powerful radio modem. You'll find that handy in a pinch. Finally, take this picklock tie pin. It will open anything up to a twelve-tumbler Chubb." 0098 scooped up his equipment and leaped into the customized Astron-Lamborgo sports phaeton

that he used for serious undercover jobs. Its tires screamed as he executed a slide turn and sped away.

The gathering that evening featured a talk on "Irregularities in the Fibonacci Series," with an open forum afterward. In the living room, the speaker was writing numbers on a blackboard while 20 Mensans interrupted him with questions. 0098 scanned the room for the face in the photo, then quickly searched the house. A back bedroom door was bolted, but yielded easily to the picklock tie pin. On the bed, draped in a tiny towel and holding a bottle of massage oil, was Brayni Beaucoup.

She was even more exciting in the flesh than he had imagined. But she wasn't moving, and he could see why. In the middle of her forehead was a neatly drilled bullet hole—a 9.5 mm Wembley-Boretta, by the shape of it. "Sorry we had to meet this way," he offered as he closed her eyes. He turned to go; but at that instant he sensed a sudden movement behind him, near the door. Whirling, 0098 dropped to the floor as a shot whistled over his head. A figure slipped out the door, locking it behind him. Within seconds, 0098 followed it into the hallway. But the figure was gone—or perhaps it had mingled in the gathering, now intently discussing prime number algorithms.

0098 returned and spent several minutes examining the room. At last he found what he was looking for. Something was written on the floor in massage oil. "Gruyère," it said. That was all.

But that was enough. Brayni had used the last of her strength to warn him about Gruyère, their operative in Zurich. Was it possible that one of their own had turned moldy? As he sped through the night toward the Swiss frontier, 0098 considered the alternatives. He plotted them nine different ways on the ball point pen computer, but the same answer always came up. Gruyère!

They met at a safe Mensa gathering in a Basel suburb. The Swiss agent—soft-spoken and urbane, but always with an edge of steel in his voice—stood in the shadows. After the usual exchange of sign and countersign, they got down to business. "We're having

a little problem with our Egg Salad," 0098 began quietly; then, suddenly, "What do you know about Celery?" He could feel Gruyère tensing.

"It's low in calories," parried the other. A cool mind, thought 0098 as he ripped off a jacket button and examined its back.

"Just how *many* calories?" Although the answer was in front of him, 0098 didn't need to read it. Agents were expected to know such things. Without trying to reply, however, Gruyère stepped back and reached inside his coat. The Wembley-Boretta gleamed evilly in the lamplight. But 0098 was quicker yet. A sharp karate chop, and the gun spun across the floor. Gruyère leaped for the window. With a crash of glass, he plummeted to the street. A luxurious, low-slung black limousine pulled away from the curb, opening its door for him as it gathered speed.

Through the streets and up into the mountains, the Astron-Lamborgo had to strain to keep up with the supercharged Zilch limousine. 0098 realized now that they were headed for the heavily guarded headquarters of LOQU, the almost legendary terrorist group. He flipped open the arming panel on his rocket launchers. If his number was up, he would take some of them with him.

A steel door slid quietly open in the mountainside and the Zilch glided in. 0098 followed, rockets blazing. A series of titanic explosions shook the ground. Flames spurted from the complicated control panels, as technicians in orange jumpsuits fled for cover. Leaping from his car, 0098 vaulted onto a steel catwalk and raced into the master control room, just as its concrete protective slab rolled shut.

"So you figured it out!" Enthroned at the massive computer console was IQ-2, his voice deep with menace. His hands stroked the levers.

"I knew you had to be behind this, IQ-2." 0098 forced a casual tone, playing for time. "Someone had to tell Gruyère about Brayni's interest profile, so he would know to look for her in the back bedroom. That information was in the file you gave me—

Q26, the Mensa code for massage. Only someone with the key to the *Mensa Directory* could have masterminded her murder. Egg Salad was merely a cover."

"You're smart, 0098," countered IQ-2. "Maybe *too* smart. It's a pity you won't be around to watch me and LOQU control the world." His hand slithered across the console and pushed a red button. From a door in the ceiling, a laser ray unit descended, pointing its fatal antenna at 0098. But suddenly it swung half-circle and fired its blast at IQ-2. With a strangled cry, the Director slumped over, his brain microwaved to medium rare. Outside, new explosions rocked the mountain redoubt.

"Yes, I'm smart," said 0098 softly. "Smart enough to program my ball point pen computer while you were talking. It sent a modem message to your mainframe, scrambling the database. You were a master schemer, IQ-2, but a lousy hacker." Quickly searching drawers in the control console, 0098 found the missing bylaws. He knew that once the Mensa network was reorganized its members could easily neutralize the remaining LOQU agents. His work was done.

Later that night, 0098 was back at the RG hospitality suite, seated at the same table. The same blonde walked by, did a double-take, and sat down beside him. "You stood me up yesterday," she said reproachfully, her fingers playing in her golden curls.

"Just a little official business," 0098 replied smoothly. "Let's take up where we left off. Let me see.... Ah, yes, I remember!" And he reached across the table for another glass of Chateau Asilomar '65.

Slaying the Ayequeue

My tale is of a time long past, when the Noble King did sit upon the throne of Merry Mensaland and his court was filled with all the finest and most gallant of the realm. In the great hall they did nightly carouse, and the stories of their deeds went out to the far corners of the kingdom.

One evening, as the company of knights sat around the Great Table telling of the deeds of intellectual chivalry they had performed that day, there came to the postern gate a youth dressed in peasant leathers. Loudly did he demand entrance to the hall, saying "It is said that herein sit those who are the brightest and most favored in the land. I would that I could gaze upon the Noble King and take my place at his table, for rightly do I belong to the company."

But the guard at the gate pushed the youth away. "Get thee hence, varlet," he exclaimed, "for I see by thy dress that ye are not of the elect and are not fit to sit around the Great Table with my liege, the Noble King of Mensaland." And he made motions to loose the royal hounds upon the hapless supplicant.

Yet the noise of this altercation did penetrate into the Great Hall and did reach the ear of the King, who straightaway sent to know what breach of the peace was disturbing his nightly pleasure. "Good my Lord," reported the messenger, "it is but a mean rascal, a peasant youth at the postern gate who claims to belong to the elect and who demands a seat at thy table. Yet he is rudely dressed, and by appearance not fit to mingle with this great company."

"Nonetheless, let him be brought in," commanded the King. "For the knights that do sit at my table are selected not by dress but by intelligence, and we all know that many a noble mind is concealed beneath cheap raiment." And it was done even as he had commanded.

When the youth appeared before the company, they all did marvel at his comely demeanor and noble bearing, albeit his clothing was indeed of the lowest sort. "Come, lad," said the King, "tell us your name and from whence you come, and tell us why you have journeyed hither."

"My name, Noble King, is Newmember. I have traveled here from Hinterland to join thy Court. Many months have I walked, over poor roads and through dark forests, past majestic castles and through strange lands, pursuing the path to thy gate. Now I pray thee to dub me one of thy elect, for in sooth I do merit a seat at thy table." And the youth bowed his head, waiting for the judgment of the King.

Now, at this time there sat in the Noble King's court a shrewd and clever magician, Medlin by name, who by his feats of necromancy had established an ascendancy over all who dwelt therein. For every one of the company, no matter how brave, did fear this old man's conjury and took care not to arouse his displeasure. And this Medlin did always sit upon the right hand of the King, the more easily to whisper in his ear. When the youthful Newmember had finished his address, therefore, Medlin leaned toward the King and spake private counsel in such tones as none but the King could hear. "This brash youth, methinks, promiseth much but delivereth little," whispered the wily old magician. "Ye taketh great risk to embrace him too readily. Prithee put him to a test, that he may demonstrate unto thy company his worthiness to be called one of the elect."

At this advice the King was sorely wrought, for he was taken with the demeanor of the youth and would readily have dubbed him then and there. But even the Noble King feared Medlin's thaumaturgy, and could not bring himself to deny the magician's counsel. Therefore he spoke unto the company in this wise: "Ye all have heard of the evil beast known as the Ayequeue, which dwelleth in the forest of Binet. Eight and ninety of the bravest of our company hath challenged this beast, but none has slain him. If this youth, Newmember, is truly fit to sit among us, then let him go forth and slay the Ayequeue." And at these words from

the King, Medlin the magus did smile inwardly and say unto himself "Thus will this loud-mouthed youth suffer for his presumption."

But Newmember did not tremble at the dreadful task that had been placed before him, nor did he beg (as Medlin had secretly hoped he would) that the Noble King would cancel his terrible words and call for a less severe test. Instead, the youth raised his face unto the King and with a firm and fearless voice cried out, "Then give me a sword and I shall this night go forth and do battle with the monster. And if my sword be true, I shall bring back the head of the Ayequeue before the dawn!" So saying, Newmember clutched a sword and scabbard that was hanging on the wall, girt it about him, and strode from the Great Hall.

Among the company that remained behind, many having raised more than a few flagons of wine that evening, there was much jest and chivvying at these words; and cruel taunts were flung at the back of the brave youth. But as he was leaving the castle, a page boy who had been attending the door of the Great Hall hurried after him. "Please, good sir," he panted, "I would attend thee, and be thy page, and share in thy adventures, if thou wilt have me."

"Dost thee not know that we are in quest of a fearsome beast, and will undergo great dangers and hardships this night?" asked Newmember.

"Verily I do," replied the page. "But I see that you are brave and good, and I believe we will prevail over any evil that may befall us."

"Then tell me thy name."

"My lord, I am called Proctor," replied the page. And as Proctor kneeled in the roadway, Newmember placed his hands upon his head and accepted him into his service. Then they set forth together in the direction of the forest where the Ayequeue dwelt.

Now all this while the evil magician Medlin had been taking counsel with himself, and saying unto his heart "This brash youth will certainly fail. But it behooveth me to make sure." So

he left the Noble King's side; and by using certain black incantations known only to himself, he flew silently through the air, over the heads of Newmember and Proctor, directly to the lair of the dreaded Ayequeue.

"Hail, Sir Beast!" cried Medlin when he had reached the Ayequeue's cave. "Behold your old friend Medlin. Come forth that I may speak to you." And from within the cave came a deep rumbling sound, accompanied by the smell of burning sulfur.

Presently the Ayequeue appeared. What a sight it made! Its green scaly body was tougher than the keenest sword; its sharp claws were like knives flashing in the air; its barbed and pointed tail switched back and forth, slicing all that it touched; and from its mouth came choking fumes and flickers of orange flame. "What seeketh you, evil magician, that you disturb my sleep?" it rumbled, while the flames from its mouth scorched the ground at Medlin's feet.

"Know, Sir Beast, that a youth approacheth and that he intends to slay thee. While it is true that ye have vanquished many in the past, merely by the force of your great claws and powerful breath, I counsel you this time to resort to stratagem. If ye wager his life upon a riddle, which none have ever solved, then ye will surely win." And the old conjurer stepped forward and whispered the riddle into the Ayequeue's green and scaly ear.

"Ho, ho," exclaimed the beast, as its breath consumed a small tree. "That is indeed a deep and intellectual riddle! I will use it, and even thank you for it!" The Ayequeue thereupon retreated into its cave, while Medlin concealed himself behind a nearby bush to watch what transpired.

Meantime, Newmember and Proctor had been making good progress through the forest, so they shortly came up to the entrance of the Ayequeue's cave. Upon seeing the scorched ground all about, and smelling the sulfur fumes, Proctor began to hang back. "My Lord," he said, "Perchance this is not the best time to affront the beast, when its fiery breath seemeth to be at its hottest. Mayhap we should come back in the wintertime, when

the ice and snow may cool the flames." But Newmember strode forward, right to the black mouth of the beast's lair, and called out loudly.

"Come forth, foul Beast," he cried, "that ye may taste the righteous edge of my trusty sword!"

For a long time, all that emanated from the cave was rumblings and fumings, until the forest rang with harsh echoes and the air was blue with smoke. But presently the Ayequeue thrust its head from the opening and confronted Newmember. "Easily might I stab you with my claws, or crush you with my tail, or scorch you with my breath," it snarled. "Nevertheless I will grant you a test. I will offer to wager your life against mine upon a riddle."

"Agreed!" cried Newmember, while the beast inwardly chuckled at the ease with which he had trapped the youth. "Tell me thy riddle, that we may shortly be done with thee."

"Answer me then," growled the Ayequeue, "What is it that a man does standing up, a lady does sitting down, and a dog does on three legs?" And the Ayequeue raised its deadly claws, to grasp Newmember if he should answer false.

"My Lord," put in Proctor (who had been shaking in his boots all this time) "perchance we should come back another time. Methinks from its discourse that this is not a very *nice* Beast."

Indeed, Newmember was at first dismayed, thinking to himself, "This Beast is as foul inside as it is outside." But suddenly a happy thought struck him.

"Truly," he shouted, "that which a man does standing up, a lady does sitting down, and a dog does on three legs is to *shake hands*."

Upon hearing these fateful words, the Ayequeue emitted a horrible screech, which rang through the forest and shivered the very branches from the trees. "Medlin, you conniving old fool, it was your counsel that brought me to this pass!" it screamed. The beast then rammed a blinding shaft of flame onto the spot where Medlin stood, reducing him instantly to a pile of ashes; and in

the same moment Newmember leaped forth and buried his sword deep in the Ayequeue's neck.

Newmember and Proctor found it easy to carry the head of the Ayequeue, since it constituted but two percent of its bulk; and so they set out immediately for the Noble King's hall with their trophy. In accordance with his promise, therefore, Newmember strode in before dawn with the Beast's head on the point of his sword. The entire company, which up to that moment had been making crude jests at his expense, immediately fell silent. Even the Noble King bowed his head. And when they heard how Medlin had been consumed by flame, their rejoicing knew no bounds. Newmember was then and there dubbed one of them, and Proctor was appointed his aide and companion.

So that is the story of the slaying of the Ayequeue. Forsooth, in later years the story has been told and retold many times; and at every mention of the gallantry of Newmember, it is universally declared that there has never been anyone who was braver or more true in all the length and breadth of Merry Mensaland.

Showdown at Mensa Gulch

There's many a tale I could tell about the Old West and the men that tamed its wild ways. But I reckon the strangest of all is the story of the day when all them little pieces of paper came aflutterin' down on the floor of McAran's Saloon.

In them days, Slick McAran's "Upper-Two Bar" was the only place a man could get a drink in Mensa Gulch—so it was a favorite gatherin' place for Mensa members thereabouts. Of course, being Mensans we only drank wine. On the day I'm tellin' of, there was a typical crowd. First off there was Slick himself, greetin' customers in his mail-order suit and back-East boots. Never far away was Evabelle, his business partner and who-knows-what-else. She was the local SEXYG coordinator, and she an' her girls held regular meetings every evenin' in the rooms upstairs. Makin' eyes at her was Dan Whitley, professional gambler and ladies' man, but she wasn't havin' none of him. Then there was Kid Kirby, a desperado travelin' through town, who held a reputation for slingin' The Fastest Pun in the West.

Over in the corner a group of regulars was playin' the latest fantasy game, "Corrals and Coyotes." Watchin' them was Judge Cummins, our local proctor and club recruiter. Standin' tall at the bar was Len Rancher, the biggest cattleman in the region. He ran near to 3000 head in Mensa Gulch alone; since they was worth $30 apiece back in New York, that made him jest about our richest citizen. And servin' him was old Toadwick, the bartender, who figures in my story as we shall see.

Well, we was havin' a pretty quiet afternoon of drinkin' and Mensa conversation when suddenly the swinging doors banged open and in stalked Turk Slimey and his gang.

"We're fixin' to git in the hot tub with all them pretty ladies," he snarled, walking right up to Evabelle. "We got money."

"Now boys, you know we don't fill the hot tub afore five o'clock," she replied. "Why don't you jest go along now, peaceable-like." But it was clear from the look on Turk's face that he was mindin' to have his way with her. About this time, old Toadwick skittered out from behind the bar and went off to find the sheriff.

I should mention that we had jest gotten a new sheriff in town, a man named Ben, on account of the old one had gotten hisself shot up by the Darlton gang. They was the same varmints that had raided the newspaper office a month earlier. Keepin' sheriffs was hard in Mensa Gulch.

Old Toadwick hadn't been gone but a minute when Sheriff Ben walked in, slow and easy-like, and laid his white hat on the bar. Mebbee it was his calm manner or mebbee it was the way he hitched up his gunbelt as he walked through the door—but as soon as Turk Slimey saw him he took his hands off of Evabelle, and he and his boys retreated to the back of the saloon. Slick McAran went up and shook Ben's hand. "Welcome to my saloon, Sheriff," he said; "I hope you're gonna like it here in Mensa Gulch. Word's goin' around that you're already kinda sweet on the schoolmarm, Miss Roberta."

"Well, Slick, I reckon a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do," said he in that deep voice of his. "I aim to bring some peace and quiet to this town. Anybody with different ideas better git while the gittin's good," he added, with a significant look at Kid Kirby.

"Then your first job will be to find out who's been holdin' up the stagecoach," put in Judge Cummins. "For six months now, they've managed to git every shipment of testing fees we've tried to send back to New York. I slip the package confidentially to the driver here in the bar before he sets out, but every time them varmints seem to know exactly which day we're sendin' off the money."

"Could be the Four Sigma gang," McAran suggested, "they're a mighty smart bunch If you can outwit them, Sheriff, I'll buy drinks on the house."

"I'll jest take my drink now," said Kid Kirby, walking up to the bar. "Gimme three fingers of that Chateau Asilomar," he ordered, pointing to a bottle standin' on the back shelf.

"Sorry, Kid," said old Toadwick, "that's the Boss's private bottle. You can have anythin' else but that."

"I'm athirstin' for Chateau Asilomar and I mean to have some." The Kid's voice had turned nasty. He was about to leap over the bar when suddenly the man from the Telegraph Office busted in.

"Word jest came in," he shouted, "They robbed the stagecoach agin this morning and got clean away!"

"Now ain't that a consarned coincidence," exclaimed Sheriff Ben. "The stagecoach gits held up and a few hours later Turk Slimey and his boys are in here wantin' to spend some money."

"Meanin' you're a-sayin' we did it! Sheriff, you're gonna eat them words!" Turk and his gang came out a-roarin' like animals, and in a minute the whole place was a mess of punchin', shootin', and broken furniture. In the middle of it all, Kid Kirby saw his chance and made a dive for the bottle of Chateau Asilomar.

He and old Toadwick was a-grappling with the bottle, holdin' it up in the air, when a shot went wild and hit the bottle smack in the belly. It broke up into slivers—but instead of wine comin' out, all of a sudden there was a million little pieces of paper in the air, jest like a snowstorm. It was so amazin' that everybody stopped fightin' to watch it.

Judge Cummins picked up one of the little paper slips. "These here are bank checks," he cried. "The missing testing fees!"

About this time, Slick McAran and old Toadwick headed for the door. But the Sheriff was too quick for them, and he soon had 'em hog-tied on the floor. "So you watched the Judge send off the fees and always knew when to have your boys stop the stage," he growled. "Then Toadwick hid the loot in that there bottle. Slick McAran, your little game is finished!"

Later, after them two critters was safely locked up in jail, we was helping ourselves at the bar. “Well, boys,” said the Judge, “Now that the testing fees are safely returned I guess we can afford to go ahead and fertilize the grass along Main Street.”

“You mean..?”

“Yep... With Ben on the job, we’re finally gonna have lawn ordure in Mensa Gulch!”

Murder in the Mensa Mansion

It was a dark and stormy night. The wind howled through the ancient elms, while the rain beat against the windows of the Mensa Mansion. Suddenly a shout rang out.

"A toast to our new home!" In the warm and spacious living room, two dozen plastic glasses were raised in celebration. The champagne sparkled, reflecting the blaze in the great baronial fireplace. As the storm raged outside, a unique Mensa party was getting under way.

It had all started six months earlier, when that fabulously rich eccentric, Martin Greatworth, had donated one of his country houses to a small but active Mensa local group. Located just on the edge of town, the house was a classic Edwardian pile of stone turrets and mullioned windows. It was an ideal party house. After countless hours of work—scrubbing the old flagstoned floors, trimming the vines that covered the lichen-stained walls, repairing and polishing the massive oak furniture—all was ready for the Housewarming. At last the guests were able to enjoy the results of their labor.

A typical Mensa bunch had turned out. Of course the LocSec was there: John Chessman, thoughtful and hard working, with a wry sense of humor. In the corner, appraising the situation, was Natasha, she of the flashing eyes, who was already mounting a challenge to John, trying to wrest away the powerful LocSec's office within the Byzantine politics of the group. Staying cool throughout the turmoil were Ben, the Assistant LocSec, and Mary, editor of the local newsletter. They knew better than to get caught in the inevitable showdown. The usual love triangle was also present: Rick, Lois, and Ronnie, making eyes at each other and smoking funny little cigarettes. Doyle, the string puller, was there; he and Natasha had been intriguing together to reorganize the group into something called "the progress of Mensa." John Panda, genial party giver, was talking to Charles Sauvignon, the

home winemaker, who had brought a selection of vintage wines for the evening. And everywhere was Forelock Holmes, taking flash pictures of the glittering assembly.

Now it was time to go in to dinner. The long trestle tables were piled with a festive potluck—casseroles, salads, and a dozen desserts. On the sideboard were the vintage bottles Charles had brought, with a treasure already uncorked and lying in its wicker basket ("Let it breathe a while," said Charles): a magnum of Chateau Asilomar '65.

John, the LocSec, proposed another toast. "I give you our health," he cried.

"You can't give me *my* health," objected Doyle; "I already have it."

"I stand corrected."

"You can't stand corrected," observed Ben, the Assistant LocSec, "because you're already sitting down." It was clear that a typical Mensa party was in progress.

"Very well," John conceded, "I will just drink in solemn silence." And he raised a glass of the Chateau Asilomar '65 to his lips.

He drained the glass with a satisfied smack. Looking around the table, his eyes took on a puzzled and distant sheen. Suddenly his face turned bright red, then a dusky purple. He gasped once, clutched his throat with a spasmodic grip, and pitched violently forward, his face making an untidy mess of the mashed potatoes. There was a moment of grotesque silence, then pandemonium broke forth.

Forelock Holmes was the first to sniff the bottle. "Cyanide!" he declared, wrinkling his nose at the reek of bitter almonds. "Enough to kill a horse, let alone a LocSec!"

All eyes turned to Ben, who by this stroke had just been promoted to LocSec. "Not me," he protested; "Anybody could have slipped into the dining room while the bottle was open on the sideboard. For example—Natasha!"

Natasha instantly realized that John's unexpected demise would open the way for victory for her in the forthcoming election. But it would not do to have her new regime sullied with rumors of regicide and usurpation. She promptly turned to her campaign manager, Doyle. "Really, darling," she breathed, "I thought we were going to run a clean campaign."

"Oh no you don't," growled Doyle, edging toward the door. "I saw who did it—the one who sneaked into the dining room before dinner: John Panda!"

There was a universal gasp. Lovable, hospitable John! He stood up at his place and cleared his throat. "I just went in there to see what was for dinner," he stammered. He appeared about to say something more, then checked himself and sat down. A silence descended over the room.

"Well," said Forelock Holmes, finally. "They don't call me Holmes for nothing. I have just been examining this bottle. It is a little known fact—probably something only a Mensan would know—that cyanide in wine produces a whitish precipitate after about four hours. This wine was dosed before the party ever started!"

Charles Sauvignon rose firmly to his feet. "You can't pin this on me," he snarled; "That bottle was sealed when I brought it here. Several of you watched me uncork it. So much for fancy theories!"

"Exactly," said Forelock Holmes, a strange smile playing on his lips. "Everybody knows that your home winemaking equipment includes a cork press. You are the only person present who could have opened the bottle four hours ago and then closed it without a trace... Stop him, somebody!"

As Charles raced for the door, a dozen hands dragged him to his knees. "Damn you and your Mensa mind," he groaned.

"I would have known anyway," declared Holmes matter-of-factly. "It's the same in every murder mystery—it's always the bottler who did it!"

Ye Table Societie

Historical Note: During the recent excavations among the ruins of Thredbere Abbey, in southwest England, a cache of medieval manuscripts turned up. Most of the documents are merely lists of accounts and records of devotional acts, typical of any thriving fifteenth century monastery. But one parchment has excited some scholarly interest. It seems to be a sort of diary composed by one Brother Marcositellus, scribe of the Abbey.

March, 1473. Our revered Abbotte, ye most hooli Brother Cerebriachus, hath been in meditatione with ye Brother Warius, who hath communicated to him a most ingenious Planne for ye Glorificatione of Godde. We are to forme a Societie of ye most pious among us, that ye Members whereof may by their Example then shew ye others of us ye true Path of Righteousness in this unhooli World. Ye two reverend Brothers have drawn up a Liste of Questiones, or Teste, ye answering of which will discern in our company those who Godde hath seen Fitte to grace with His infinitte Understandinge.

April, 1473. Ye Questiones, an Hundred in number, have been put to alle ye Brothers. Each Questione begins with ye rubric *Iesus Quaestionat,* signifying *Our Lord doth Ask You,* and therefore ye Teste hath been popularlie called Ye IQ Teste among ye Brothers; but it is more correctly clept a Teste of Scripture, as ye Questiones addresse ye little known Facts in ye hooli Bookes. Some Dozen among us have now been able to answer Eight and Ninety out of ye Hundred, this beinge ye Requirement for Membershippe in ye new Societie. We looke for greate Thinges in this our new Venture.

August, 1473. Ye Members of ye new Societie have taken to meetinge late at Nighte, behinde clos'd Doors, they claiminge that this Practise does advance their spiritual Perfectione. But this doth not explaine ye grosse Quantitie of Wine and Beere that they doe consume therein, nor eke ye Soundes of loud Talke that

doe bother ye lesse spiritual Monks during ye late nighte Hours withal. They calle themselves Ye Table Societie, after that article of Furniture that they are frequently found sleepinge under during Matins. We ordinary Brothers are stille waiting for Enlightenmente from ye Elect.

December, 1473. After much Complaint, ye Brothers of Ye Table Societie have agreed to publishe a Parchment every Monthe, ye which will disseminate ye greate spiritual Truths that they have discovered in their noisie eveninge Meditationes. Ye first of these hath been handed about, but it seemeth to me but a paltrie Tissue of platitudes and sillie Arguments, hardlie worthie of our Expectationes from this greate Worke. Ye Tablers, for soe they doe calle themselves, are now demandinge ye assistance of a few Nunnes in their nightly Proceedinges, ye better to advance their spiritual Perfectione.

February, 1474. Ye Tablers have got their Nunnes, and have begun a most strange Practise, ye Like of which hath never been seen in this or any other Abbey. They have cut a Wine Barrell in Halfe, and constructed of it a sort of Bath, ye which they doe calle a Hot-Tubbe, which they fill with boilinge Water and doe sitte therein with their Nunnes. It cannot be in service of Cleanlinesse, for they did all bathe ye last Swithin's Day with ye Rest of us; meseemeth it is some kind of Medicament for ye Purification of ye Braine.

April, 1474. It is Sadde for me to report, that among those most hooli Brothers, ye Tablers, there hath been much Dissensione and blasphemous Name callinge, ye which hath disturbed this Abbey not a little. There appear to be now two Societies of Tablers, each callinge ye other ye Inne-Groupe, which meet in differente Roomes, but with as much Noise as before, and write nastie Parchments about eache other. This matter hath come to ye Attentione of ye Bishop. Godde help us all.

May, 1474. Well, ye Fatte is in ye Fyre now. Ye Most Hooli Reverend Bishop did arrive unexpectedly in ye Nighte, when ye Tablers were hard at it in their Hot-Tubbe, advancing ye spiritual Worke with much singing and sacramental Wine, and threw

open ye Doors to ye Sanctums. This did send ye Nunnes scurryinge, and in truth they did not looke much like ye Nunnes one sees at hooli Shrines. Ye Most Hooli Reverend Bishop did then and there Dissolve ye Table Societie, and did adjure ye Brothers therein to do Penance for their Presumption. As a mere Scribe, it did me Goode to see these Fellowes taken down a Notche.

September, 1474. Ye Table Societie is not Deade after all. Ye ingenious Members thereof, after a Period of Despondencie following ye Departure of ye Most Hooli Reverend Bishop, did bethink themselves of a lesse Blasphemous way to resume their nightly spiritual Queste. They talke now of studyinge ye pagan Philosophers, ye better to shew up ye Errors of their anciente Bookes, and have for that Purpose constructed a new Teste, ye which contains Questiones of which I can make neither Heade nor Taile. Some of these Questiones ask one to count ye Blockes in a Pile of Masonrie; others ask for ye next Number in a meaninglesse Collectione; yet others demand a reply to such Drivell as Graine is to Breade as Grapes are to What. Godde save us from this new Madnesse, which is like to Breake up ye Abbey and bringe us alle to Ruine. Methinks it soundes much like Heresie, and not at alle to ye Likinge of My Lord ye Bishop, who doth not yet Know of it...

Historical Note: The rest of this manuscript is unreadable, having been scorched beyond recognition in the great fire of 1475 that destroyed Thredbere Abbey. Although the usually garrulous archives at Canterbury suddenly fall silent on this point, it appears that the Tablers fell to internecine warfare again. After one faction had set fire to the Abbey, the whole society was prorogued by the ecclesiastical authorities and its leaders were attached to a mendicant order in northern Scotland. The others who had been exposed to the idea were dispersed among the monasteries of England. All that remained were the ruins of Thredbere Abbey, which continue to excite wonder and inspiration in the visitor today.

Personal Notes

During my six years with *The Ecphorizer,* my life underwent a sea change. I got married, started a family, and traded freelance consulting for a steady job. It was these occupations that ultimately forced me to give up the editorship.

Evidence of my life's transformations appeared from time to time in the magazine—most notably in the narrative "Story of a Wedding," which is printed at the end of this section. Other personal pieces constituted a miscellany of reminiscences and unsolicited advice. In some cases they were "casuals" whose primary purpose was to flesh out a particular issue.

So this section is something of a mixture. These pieces in it are personal in the sense that they primarily record my own experiences. Reading a raw account of someone else's doings can be unrewarding—witness the soporific effect of most Christmas newsletters—so I have tried to emphasize incidents that I feel have some universal validity. If they strike a chord in the reader, then my job as writer has succeeded. ❖

High-Brow, Low-Brow—A Reminiscence

Like some Mensans, I got ahead of myself in grammar school and entered high school at the age of 12. After an unhappy semester as the brainy runt of the ninth grade, I was taken out by my parents and enrolled as a special student at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. Officially, I spent a year and a half studying sculpture and design; actually, I took a memorable trip through woodworking, stone carving, welding, potting, and silversmithing, primarily under the tutelage of sculptor Bob Winston.

Those were halcyon days for American artists. The war was over and the traditional European art centers were rebuilding. Over here, the GI Bill provided an access of patronage that the Medicis might have envied. It financed a whole generation of new bohemians.

Art was ripe for re-examination. "The reason we think a rose is beautiful," Winston declared, "is because our parents always told us it was." Traditionalism was out, Mondrians and mobiles and dribble paintings were in. Bauhaus lingered on only because of its respect for materials ("form follows function"). Now that the possibility of future wars had been eliminated, mankind could concentrate on freeing its "artistic instincts." My principal regret at this point was that I was still too young to grow a beard.

In the midst of this esthetic ferment, an extraordinary article suddenly appeared—in *Life* magazine, of all places. It was titled "High-Brow, Low-Brow, Middle-Brow" and it seemed to crystallize all the things we had been saying. Within the microcosm of an avant-garde art school, its appearance in April, 1949, caused a sensation.

Based on some scholarly observations by Russell Lynes, editor of *Harper's,* the *Life* article declared that America had become a "society of the intellectual elite, run by high-brows." O Millennium! It went on to describe how the high-brows—scientists, writers, artists—managed to protect their values from the hordes of established middlebrows, who they despised as "culturemongers." This was heady stuff for a bunch of starving artists.

The high-brow, it pointed out, gets along with low-brows; he "even envies their uncritical enjoyment of the things they like." He saves his ire for the invading upper middle-brows, who read Toynbee and the *New Yorker* and "by their pretended culture seem determined to coarsen high-brow treasures."

But the best part was the way *Life* fleshed out its cultural categories with actual examples. In a chart spread across two pages, it illustrated the tastes of the typical high-brow, upper middle-brow, lower middle-brow, and low-brow. Here, at last, we found our values triumphant.

In the beverage column, for example, the high-brow drinks "a glass of 'adequate little' red wine, which he buys for 90 cents a gallon"; the upper middle-brow drinks "a very dry martini with lemon peel"; the lower middle-brow drinks bourbon and ginger ale, while the low-brow drinks beer. For entertainment, the high-brow favors ballet, the upper middle-brow live theater, the lower middle-brow Hollywood musicals, and the low-brow westerns. In sculpture, the high-brow contemplates Calder stabiles while the upper middle-brow enjoys Maillol nudes; the lower middle-brow is satisfied with carved animals, and the low-brow buys a reproduction of the *Venus de Milo* with a clock in her navel.

Many of the esthetic edicts in that article stayed with me over the years. The high-brow's favorite recordings are described (exquisitely) as "Bach and before, Ives and after." His salad consists of "greens, olive oil, wine vinegar, ground salt, ground pepper, garlic, unwashed salad bowl." (The upper middle-brow, not quite getting the point, eats the same but adds tomatoes, avocado, and Roquefort cheese; he also washes the bowl). The

high-brow wears a "fuzzy Harris tweed suit, no hat" and sits in an Eames chair. His coffee table sports a "decanter and ashtray from a chemical supply company"—a Pyrex flask and a porcelain evaporating dish. He reads the *Partisan Review.* His favorite game is go.

In contrast, the culture-climbing but subtly ignorant upper middlebrow listens to Brahms and Chopin; he wears a Brooks Brothers suit and owns antique furniture. *His* coffee table is adorned with an engraved silver cigaret box. His favorite game is charades (bridge is for lower middle-brows). He subscribes to *Harper's.*

Rereading this article after more than 30 years, I realize that some of its judgments are dated. Does anyone, high-brow or not, still read Rilke? While the present-day high-brow might choose a Kurt Versen gooseneck floor lamp, wouldn't he be just as likely to covet the lowbrow's brass plated bridge lamp with its fringed shade? And as a result of the march of technology, low-brows have surely graduated from "pulps and comic books" to TV sitcoms. But these are minor flaws.

Although historians may say that the American intellectual elite lost its grip on the country some twenty years ago in Dallas, the other conclusions of this semi-serious article still ring true. There *are* high-brows and low-brows, and it is important to understand what they like and why they like it. While I am no longer personally concerned to Save The World From Norman Rockwell, I like to think that our fervent discussions in those distant years are still alive today.

Ducknity

Graham Quacker and Saltine Quacker were two white Pekin ducks who shared my home for four years. When I gave parties they would waddle over to the patio door and quack at my guests, attracted by the festivities but mindful of their station. They had a unique carriage in life, which I eventually came to call "ducknity."

Domesticated ducks are extremely conservative; they seldom venture into the unknown, and small changes in their environment can occasion much wary discussion. I could almost translate their dialog:

Graham: "What's that deck chair doing in the middle of the lawn?"

Saltine: "I can't imagine! I distinctly recall that it was next to the table yesterday."

Graham: "Well, we better stay away from it. You can't be too careful these days."

It was this sort of attitude, combined with their stately and slightly ponderous mode of progression, that gave my friends an air of ducknity.

I acquired Graham and Saltine as an Easter pleasantry in 1975, two yellow fluffballs barely five days out of the egg. At first I just fixed them a wooden box with a light bulb and thermostat, and watched them peep and stagger about. But they grew at a prodigious rate, and soon they were self-confident citizens of my back yard.

To celebrate their two-week birthday, I took them out of their box to show them the outdoors. It was their first sight of the Big World, but they took it in stride. For every situation there was a built-in instinct that guided them. Snails were to be eaten without question: grass was something you searched for snails

in; water was what you swam in; mud was for rooting. The only thing not specifically covered in their highly evolved view of the world was a pink plastic wastebasket that I used for potting soil. From the beginning they held it in deep suspicion, as an obviously contrived duck trap of diabolical design. This suspicion lasted their whole lives, and provided me with a convenient way to keep them away from one end of the yard—simply set out the Pink Duck Trap.

Regardless of what lessons they may have absorbed that first day, I learned something from them. My house was located near a beach, and a variety of large birds flew regularly over the yard. Each time a bird passed overhead, both ducks would lay their heads over, examining its silhouette intently with one eye. When the bird was a seagull, they would ignore it and go on about their business. But once a hawk flew over. Immediately both ducks headed for the nearest bushes, stumbling and quacking in alarm. I later learned from a naturalist that birds of prey have discrete control feathers on their wings, like fingers, which help them control their precision dives. Graham and Saltine were programmed to look for those separated feathers, and head for cover when they saw them.

Imprinting does work, and my ducks imprinted to me. I practiced until I could emit a realistic and authoritative quack. When they heard it they would hurry over and stand at my feet, conversing furiously.

Naturally, they loved water; so I dug them a pond. But they also loved mud. Whenever I refilled the pond they would happily swim and root for three or four hours, until they had converted it into an unlovely brown soup. Then they would waddle out and quack forlornly, bemoaning that fate had sent them such short-lived pleasure. They spent much of their time cajoling another pond cleaning out of me.

Graham and Saltine were both males, but Graham was slightly larger. As a consequence, he normally dominated Saltine. When they both sighted a snail simultaneously, for example, Graham would always push Saltine out of the way as he snaffled the

prize. However, I always felt that Saltine tolerated Graham's bullying more from a love of accommodation than a feeling of fear. This was confirmed one day. After a particularly hot, dry spell, I had been persuaded to refill their pond. There was much jostling for position at the edge as the water flowed in, and Graham evidently assumed he was going in first. But at the critical moment, Saltine delivered a vicious peck on the neck that sent Graham fleeing to the other end of the yard. Saltine then took a leisurely swim of twenty minutes or so in the crystal water before Graham diffidently slipped in.

Although their staple diet was Purina Duck Chow, their great love was snails. On their birthday (hatchday, actually), I always bought them a small can of French escargots, which they gobbled with relish.

When Graham and Saltine were four years old—well past middle age for a duck—I moved to Sunnyvale, into a house with a pool. It would have been cruel to deny them such a glorious water hole, yet insupportable to let them turn it into their favored kind of wallow. So I decided to move them into a retirement community, so to speak. After some negotiation, they were accepted at the college of their choice—the Oakland Children's Zoo. The San Francisco Mensa *Intelligencer* carried a brief but tasteful notice that they were At Home in their new quarters, and would welcome old friends.

Parting was sad, but it was not the last time I saw Graham and Saltine. A year later I visited the zoo and talked to the curator who had accepted them. He said that after a few weeks of disorientation—walking wing-in-wing together on the fringes of society, so to speak—they had finally become integrated. Now they were respected members of the local pond community.

I went over to the pond. It was Sunday afternoon, and a dozen people were standing around the edge. I uncorked my expert quack one last time. A few onlookers smirked. Then Graham and Saltine detached themselves from a mass of waterfowl in the center of the pond. Flapping their wings so they almost walked on the water, they hurried to my feet and poured out a long

rigmarole of news and greeting. The smirkers gaped. I gave my ducks one last goodbye, and they swam back to their kind, models of ducknity to the end.

The World's Lengthiest Joke

OK, you folks at Guiness, listen up, because I am going to describe to you the World's Lengthiest Joke. It is one where the punch line can be anywhere from a quarter-hour to several weeks later than the buildup. That must surely qualify it for mention in the *Book of World Records*. Please spell my name right when listing it.

I have told this joke several times at dinner parties. It has always worked. You can tell it, too. Of course you may find yourself invited to fewer and fewer dinners. But a good joke is always worth that risk. Here's how it goes.

Finding a lull in the conversation, you remark off-handedly that at a recent gathering you heard a story told that others found hilarious, but that seemed pointless to you. You'd like to retell it, to see if the present company gets the point. Thus begins the buildup:

> "One day a Certified Public Accountant decided to build a house for himself, entirely out of brick. Being a typical CPA, he sat down with the finished plans and very carefully calculated exactly how many bricks it would take. He then ordered exactly that many bricks and carefully counted them when they arrived. All through the construction he watched the workmen to see that no bricks were wasted or omitted. When the house was completed, however, there was one brick left over. Perplexed, he rechecked his figures. Everything tallied. With increasing frustration, he checked again and again. Finally, in a fit of fury, he threw the extra brick up in the air. It disappeared."

At this point the company usually falls into an expectant silence. "That's all?" someone asks. "That's all," you say. They all agree that it is not a particularly funny story, and talk drifts off into other channels.

You now bide your time. Anywhere from five minutes to several weeks will do, although it is usually best to finish your work the same evening. At another lull in the conversation, you launch a new story. This time it is a free adaptation of an incident in one of Dostoevsky's novels:

> "It is the nineteenth century and a train is rumbling through the night, across the frozen Siberian waste. In a first class compartment the sole occupants are a large, untidy gentleman and an aristocratic lady holding a small lap dog. They regard each other with disdain and do not speak. Presently the large man pulls out a fat cigar and lights it, with many puffs of blue smoke. The lap dog starts coughing. The lady is incensed, as it is forbidden to smoke in a first class compartment. But she will not stoop to reprove the fat commoner. Instead, with a burst of energy, she pulls down the window, seizes the cigar, and throws it out into the snow. The man is at first stunned. But suddenly he realizes that it is equally forbidden to carry animals in a first class compartment. With a furious movement, he scoops up the unfortunate dog and flings *it* out the window.
>
> Tableau. At last the lady rises from her petrification and pulls the emergency cord. Bells ring and the train shudders to a halt. Officials and passengers step down into the snow. It is a bright, moonlit night. The dog has survived—far down the frozen track one can see it running toward the train. And in its mouth it is carrying an object. Can you guess what that object is?"

Assuming you've told your story well, and enough alcohol has been consumed at the table, someone will surely rise to the bait.

"It's the cigar!"

"No," you reply, not skipping a beat, "it's the Certified Public Accountant's extra brick."

Then you head quickly for the door.

Sherlockian Scholarship

The *American Mensa Directory* lists 243 members who have indicated that one of their interests is Sherlock Holmes. Not just an interest in reading the Holmes stories, but in analyzing them, comparing them, and in some cases memorizing them.

Although it didn't occur to me to mention Sherlock when filling out the Mensa form, I should also be on that list. I have read what Holmes scholars call "the Canon"—the complete authoritative text of all the stories, published as a single volume by Doubleday—uncounted times. I have savored those moments at 221b Baker Street when Holmes and Watson listened to another inexplicable narration by one of Sherlock's clients. I have followed Holmes' reasoning with admiration (and maybe a modest suspension of disbelief) as he turned over an object in his hands and proceeded to deduce a list of facts about its owner. And I have traveled vicariously with Holmes and Watson as they set off to unravel another skein of cause and effect amid the variegated scenes of Victorian London. In fact, as a teenager I almost joined the flagship of Holmes scholarship societies, the "Baker Street Irregulars."

At that time, admittance to the Sherlockian elect required taking and passing an examination of some 500 questions about Holmesian minutiæ. "Identify three spaniels mentioned in the Canon." "For which client did the Master disguise himself as a Nonconformist clergyman?" "What was the title of the painting by Greuze owned by Professor Moriarty?" It is not surprising that true Sherlockians could dredge up such information; one I knew (who was a member of the Irregulars) could recite passages from the Canon by the page. As early as the l950s, a detailed chronology of Holmes' life had been laboriously worked out and a concordance of the Canon was being circulated in typescript.

Holmes scholarship got a big boost in 1967 with the publication of a two-volume work called *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, a comprehensive guide and variorum to the Canon. This was followed in 1977 by *The Encyclopedia Sherlockiana,* compiled over a period of six years by Jack Tracy and published by Doubleday. The *Encyclopedia* was so successful that it came out in paperback; it is now being remaindered for $3.95, if you are lucky enough to find a bookstore that has it.

The Encyclopedia Sherlockiana is one of those reference books you can read from cover to cover. It answers all the nagging little questions that haunt those familiar with the Canon. What was the "gasogene" that lurked in the corner of 221b Baker street? The book has a description, complete with a cross-section diagram. (For those who can't wait to know, it was an arrangement of two glass globes, one above the other. In the bottom was pure water, in the top a dry mixture of chemicals that produced carbon dioxide gas. When it was gently tilted, a small quantity of water could be transferred through a central pipe to the top chamber, where it started a reaction that aerated the water in the bottom. The resulting soda was drawn off through a valve). What did Watson mean when he said that Stamford "had been a dresser under me at Bart's"? The *Encyclopedia* defines "dresser" as "a surgeon's assistant" and includes a contemporary photograph of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, the oldest benevolent institution in the metropolis. What is a "tidewaiter"? He is a customs official who meets incoming ships. What is "aqua tofana"? It is a secret poison, supposedly invented by a Sicilian woman named Tofana at the end of the seventeenth century and used by her to dispatch no fewer than 600 souls. Questions like these, which had bothered me for years, were now laid to rest.

On the other hand, the *Encyclopedia* has its obtuse moments. Because it is dedicated to the proposition that Holmes was real and everything in the Canon is true, it is forced to glide over certain awkward bits. Watson's war wound, for example. Under "Jezail," it notes merely that Watson was struck "on the shoulder

or in the leg." But that hardly does justice to the gap between *A Study in Scarlet,* where Watson was "struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery," and *The Sign of Four,* where we find him nursing his "wounded leg (which) had had a Jezail bullet through it some time before." In one of the early journals of Holmes scholarship I recall a much less forgiving article on the subject. It was illustrated with a villainous drawing of Watson, his back to the enemy, bending over to tie his shoe while a single bullet causes both wounds. The scurrilous author went on to offer some entirely uncalled-for speculations on his possible loss of manhood in the process and the nature of his subsequent relationship with Sherlock.

The *Encyclopedia* also suffers from an excessive delicacy about what its compiler calls the "coarse realities" of Victorianism. Thus although he indexes "sheeny" as "vulgar slang for a Jew," the author cannot bring himself to mention that the police inspector at The Three Gables referred to "that gang of Barney Stockdale, with the big nigger in it." The Victorians had their unmentionables, we have ours.

By the way, the *Encyclopedia* scorns to recognize the famous deerstalker cap, Inverness cape, and calabash pipe of popular Holmes iconography. These are the inventions of various playwrights and movie directors; they have no provenance in the Canon. The calabash, for example, was concocted on the spur of the moment by an actor with sore teeth who wanted a pipe that would rest comfortably on his chin during the performance. Holmes holds the odd distinction of having been portrayed by more different actors in movies and TV than any other fictional character—over 100 so far.

One of the more delightful sections of the *Encyclopedia* is the entry about the "Untold Tales"—stories that Watson alludes to in passing but which we shall never hear. One can speculate for hours about "the singular affair of the aluminium crutch" or the "repulsive story of the red leech." The "bogus laundry affair" tantalizes us, along with the arrest of Wilson "the notorious

canary trainer," and the case of the giant rat of Sumatra, "a story for which the world is not yet prepared." Alas that Watson was never moved to lay before the public "the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant"! Nevertheless, these asides in the Canon stimulate many pleasant reveries for the dedicated Sherlockian.

Seldom does a fictional character come so alive as Holmes. For some, he surpasses his creator in substance. The *Encyclopedia,* for instance, unblushingly refers to Conan Doyle as "literary agent for Dr. John H. Watson in the placing for publication of Watson's adventures with Sherlock Holmes." It is an irony that Doyle, who spent much of his life proposing theories about life after death, should live today as an adjunct to the creatures of his imagination.

Yet Another Diet Plan

Large bookstores nowadays have entire sections devoted to diet books. Doctor Hackflesh's Secret Regime. The Miracle Seven Day Diet. Jane Fundament's Exercise and Diet Book. The Pickles-and-Yeast Diet. Eat Cream Pies and Stay Slim. Besides being the world's best fed society, it seems we are also the most interested in avoiding the consequences of being well fed.

In leafing through these books, I have been struck by the fact that their messages are usually expressible in a single sentence, or at least a short list of "Eat" and "Don't Eat" foods. I mean, what can you say about a diet? But no one gets rich selling a single sheet of paper. So the authors and publishers of such books have (pardon the metaphor) fattened their ideas into a form they are not ashamed to peddle for $12.95. The business cries for someone to put an end to all this puffery by putting out, in a single volume, an Anthology of American Diets.

Meanwhile, however, I am coming to the rescue. Your *Ecphorizer* subscription has just been enhanced, at no additional cost, by the addition of Towner's Magic Diet. I will reveal it to you now. While other diet plans may require several lines for their explication, the Magic Diet can be expressed is three short words:

Don't eat lunch.

Come now, you will exclaim, such a regime surely can't work. And if it did, it would be unbearable. Not so, at least for me. It transported me from 180 to 160 pounds, a critical difference for a six-foot male. I am still losing about two pounds a month, and expect to taper off soon by noontime snacking on fruit or veggies. As for its being unbearable, I find it a great convenience. No more hassling food in the middle of the day. No more breaking off work or recreation to answer hunger pangs. After

the first couple of weeks of the Magic Diet my daytime hunger pangs disappeared.

Of course there is more to it than just forgetting about lunch. I pig out at breakfast and I pig out at dinner. I naturally eat a fairly balanced selection of foods and get a healthy amount of exercise. But it seems to me that two good meals, 12 hours apart, suit my body's needs perfectly. Lunch is just a fat-maker.

The Magic Diet is marvelous when you're traveling. As a matter of fact, I learned it from Christine Palmer-Persen when we were bumming through Central Africa. At first it was merely a convenience; it meant we weren't condemned to a bowl of greasy goat meat and pounded yams in whatever village the bus stopped at between cities. But soon I noticed that I no longer missed midday food. Moreover I was more alert during the afternoons. Dinner became more of an occasion. Christine has been following the Magic Diet for years and has a very trim figure to show for it.

So there you are: yet another diet plan. The main difference between it and all the rest that crowd the bookstore shelves is that this one didn't cost you $12.95.

Leave It To Sedgwick

Have you ever suddenly realized that there was something missing from your life? I don't mean a generalized sense of anxiety, but rather an awakening to the fact that your life lacks something specific. "Aha," you say to yourself, "with *that*, everything would be complete!" This happened to me recently, so I hasten to share the experience.

In my case, the item missing from my life is a butler.

Now, I have virtually no silverware to polish; my wine cellar (actually, half of a coat closet) can be managed without professional help; and meal service for me usually consists of carrying pots from the stove to the table, a ritual to which no proper butler is likely to condescend. Nonetheless, there is a goodly list of household tasks I would rather not do, for which the services of an intelligent and discreet butler would be well suited. As I fantasize my butler (let us call him Sedgwick), the list grows longer and longer.

For example, Sedgwick could edit the commercials out of television programs. While I am quietly reading a good book, or out walking the dog, he is slaving away in the pantry (guess I'll have to build him a pantry), splicing videotape. Snip goes another "washday product." Zap goes what five New York doctors think about somebody's stomach pills. G'bye, credit furniture peddler! When I watch the tube, which will be at *my* command and in tune with *my* leisure, each program will sail forward in serene entirety, unstained by loudmouthed salesmen.

But that's only the beginning. Sedgwick will intercept my magazines on the way in and remove from them those damn postcards that cause them to flop open in your hands. Some of these are called "blow-in cards" from the way they're inserted during the printing process; others are stapled fiendishly into place. Out they go! Rip, slash, and into the trash!

And while he is working on my mail, Sedgwick will divert much of it into the Junk Mail Shredder (which I will need to buy for him). He will be particularly alert to items in brown window envelopes labeled "Official Notification Enclosed," which turn out to be subscription offers from simple-minded digest-type magazines; missives that appear to contain credit cards but are actually pitches for hospitalization insurance; and bearers of what look like checks that later reveal themselves to be nonnegotiable contest come-ons. Sedgwick's shredder will grind merrily through them all.

I will remove all the bells from my phones except the one in the pantry, which Sedgwick will answer. Never again will I squish my way out of the shower and into the bedroom, only to be informed that I am suddenly eligible to receive "The Insider's Report on Pork Belly Futures." I will mercifully unlearn the inane interchange of the WATS-line canvasser:

"Hello Mr Towner my name is Mark Huckster how are you this evening."

"I am fine what are you selling."

My telephone will once again become a civilized instrument of communication between people who are truly interested in talking to one another.

Sedgwick will prepare my bills for payment. He will remove from the envelopes all four-color advertisements for clock radios and electric blankets; all chatty newsletters telling me how much the electric company is doing to improve my way of life; and all pitches for credit card insurance. Then he will cut away all extraneous flaps, pop-outs, and perforated doodads from the return envelopes, restoring them to their primal function of enclosing my checks. He will also analyze the mysterious entries on my credit card bills—noting, for example, that the charge from "LRC Corp" in Portland, Oregon, actually originated in the chain restaurant down the street.

Finally, Sedgwick will perform the traditional butler's function of answering the door. He will deal kindly with rosy-cheeked

kids who may or may not actually need to sell only one more newspaper subscription to win a trip to Great America. He will listen patiently as the bearers of tracts try to rescue his soul from the Eternal Flames. But I will instruct him to give short shrift to roofers and tree trimmers, who just happen to have finished a job in the neighborhood and can give me a good deal on work they could see from the street is desperately needed. He will, of course, recognize my friends and admit them without hesitation.

As my butler's list of duties grows, I wonder how much it will all cost. The salary and extras, the uniform, the pantry, the Junk Mail Shredder. But sometimes one's needs must be satisfied regardless of expense. Life must go on. Besides, a really good butler should be able to pay for himself in many ways.

"Hey, Sedgwick, answer the door. I think it's the sheriff again, trying to repossess the furniture. You handle it."

Story of a Wedding

I met Danielle in November, 1984, when she was vacationing with my old friends, Paul and Madeleine Gregson. We spent several weeks together, fell in love, and corresponded after she had returned to Paris. The following February we rendezvoused in London and flew down to Egypt for two weeks. It was there that we decided to get married.

Babes in the Woods. Before parting in London, we went to the American Consulate to ask about the formalities required for me to marry Dany (a French citizen) and bring her to live in America. In the visa section, behind the counter, sits a veritable clone of Alistair Cooke, who hands out forms and advice. We later learned that he is known locally as the "Information Man." He described two lengthy and complicated procedures and one simple procedure, which he recommended. Since Dany already had a permanent visitor's visa that permitted unlimited entries, he said, she could come to the U.S. as a visitor and we could get married there. Then I could apply by mail to the Immigration Service to change her status from visitor to permanent resident. He showed us the places on the form that you fill out to change the status of someone who is already inside the country. He said that 95% of the time they would restamp her passport with no difficulty; 5% of the time they might require her to leave the country for a few days and re-enter. We figured that since her 14-year-old son, Stéphane, was to join us in July, she could use that opportunity to return to Paris and re-enter the U.S. Thus we left the American Consulate in a pink cloud of ignorance, thinking how wonderfully straightforward our immigration laws must be.

Wedding Plan Number One. So Dany went back to Paris and started packing. She gave up her apartment, quit her job as a bank officer, and crated up her books. In Sunnyvale, meanwhile, I planned our wedding. Since it was a second marriage for both

of us, we chose the simplest route—an instant wedding in Reno with a show at the MGM Grand afterward. But we scheduled a big reception on April 27th and printed up 300 invitations. Our friends pitched in to help welcome Dany to her new home.

On Saturday, April 13th—two days before the wedding—Dany flew to London and boarded a World Airways flight for Oakland. A few hours later the plane touched down in Baltimore to clear U.S. Customs before proceeding onward. Dany, who speaks very little English, handed in her passport with a smile.

The Big Bust. At this point, the reader needs to understand some of what we later learned about U.S. immigration regulations. Unlike all other visas in the world, a U.S. visitor's visa does not attempt to regulate one's travel to America. You can go in and out as much as you want. Instead, it regulates one's *state of mind* at the instant one enters the country. If you're thinking of your foreign home at the moment you hand in your passport then all is OK, even if you subsequently decide to stay here forever. If you are thinking of staying, then you are committing a serious crime; that state of mind requires an immigrant visa. The form for changing a visitor's status applies only to those who enter the country while thinking of home and then decide to stay, even if this decision occurs only five minutes later. We were utterly unaware of these dialectical niceties when the bananas hit the fan in Baltimore.

The immigration officers looked at Dany's ticket, which included no return flight. Suspicious now, they asked her questions in English which she didn't understand and couldn't answer. They seized her purse and went through her personal papers. Among them was a printer's proof of the marriage announcement. The great wedding conspiracy was revealed!

From that point on, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service behaved like a Balkan secret police dealing with a common prostitute. They subjected Dany to a humiliating body search for concealed narcotics. They pushed her around and ripped out the linings of her clothes and baggage. They asked her sarcastic, intimate questions in broken French and sneered at

her answers. They refused to let her make any phone calls, collect or otherwise. They bullied her into signing papers she couldn't understand and wouldn't give her copies. They locked her up for 24 hours in a room with a light burning so she couldn't sleep. Finally they dumped her onto a plane back to London.

It was thanks to the kindness and concern of World Airways that I found out what was happening. They managed to get my phone number from Dany and called me at 5 pm Saturday afternoon. One of their employees, who spoke French, smuggled to Dany my promise to meet her plane in London. They gave me the phone number of the Immigration Service in Baltimore. I phoned them with offers to go to Baltimore, post a cash bond, take personal responsibility, cancel the wedding, etc., but it was like talking to a stone wall. Dany was being booted out and that was that.

Au Secours. Paul and Madeleine Gregson were magnificent. While they were driving to pick me up, I grabbed my passport and credit cards and packed a knapsack. I just made a 7 pm flight from San Francisco which landed me 12 hours later in London.

Monday morning I met Dany at Gatwick Airport. After hearing what my government had done to her in Baltimore, it was easy for me to promise that I would not return to California without her. We went again to the American Consulate. This time we talked to a genuine Foreign Service Officer. She was most apologetic. What we had tried to do was common practice, but carried out by people more wily than we. In effect, we had been caught by our own honesty. The Information Man should never have given us only half the story. Steps Would Be Taken, etc. However, now that Dany's passport was stamped with big red warnings the damage could be repaired only in Paris.

Tuesday we checked out the possibility of getting married in Britain (two weeks residence required) and took the boat train to Paris. Bright and early Wednesday we were banging on the doors of the American Consulate in the rue St. Florentin. Under

the circumstances, all things considered, and so on, they advised, our best bet now was to get married in France and then apply in Paris for an immigrant visa. Nothing could be done until we were able to show a valid marriage certificate.

The French Connection. So that is how we came to stay for two weeks with Dany's mother in the village of Santeny, where Dany was born. In France, civil marriages are performed at the *mairie,* or mayor's office, of the village where one party lives. But when we first talked to the mayor of Santeny he had his doubts. Marriage to an American? There were regulations, forms, *publications, attestations*—he waved his arms and his voice trailed off. We scooted back to Paris and hired an English-speaking attorney. He started drawing up papers to establish my existence under French law.

In the end, we negotiated the *mairie* down to four documents: an *extrait d'acte de naissance,* in lieu of a French birth certificate; a *certificat de coutume,* stating that I had no other wives stashed away; a *certificat medical*; and an *attestation sur l'honneur* to tie up loose ends. The *coutume* was particularly gorgeous—our Paris lawyer pulled out all the stops for that one. Friday afternoon, April 19th, we handed in all our papers and they posted the banns on the public notice board in Santeny.

Under French law, one can marry on the morning of the eleventh day after the banns are posted. This gave us more than a week to get Dany's visa going. At the same time, we dropped Stéphane's application into the mill. With some glimmerings of sympathy, the consulate in Paris agreed to start their background checks ahead of time. Meanwhile, they handed us a four-page list of required documents, all to be presented in duplicate. We rented a car and started tracking down papers.

Bureaucracy Rules. About this time I started lying awake nights with spooky thoughts. My government had told me to get married first, then ask them for permission to bring my wife home. If all the required forms and attestations had any meaning, then they must have been able to refuse. What would we do if they said no? I wondered whether my Silicon Valley

skills could earn me a living in France, Canada, or England. I also wondered whether my government had the right to put me in such a fix. I still wonder.

Nevertheless, we played the game with diligence. The police report, certifying that Dany had never been in jail, required a nine-hour drive to Nantes. I had to produce recent tax returns and my 1973 divorce decree. Blood tests, fingerprints, and a chest X-ray for Dany. Passports and birth and marriage certificates all around. Finally (I kid you not), three color photos of Dany's and Stéphane's right ears. By Friday, May 3rd, we had all our documentary ducks in a row and presented ourselves to the American consul.

During this period the banns had ticked away. At 10:30 on Tuesday morning, April 30th, we gathered in the Mayor's office. Dany's mother, two sisters, and a girl friend served as witnesses. The mayor donned his official tricolored sash of office and recited the marriage sections of the *Code Civil.* He asked us each if we were ready to provide mutual *fidélité, secours,* and *assistance*. We answered "*oui.*" He produced two impressive documents in blue binders, looking like international peace treaties, which everybody signed. Finally he broke out a splendid speech in English, welcoming me to the community of Santeny. He handed us the customary *livret de famille,* a booklet with pages to record the vital statistics of up to ten children.

Curiously enough, there is a period of a few days after an American marries a French citizen during which he may elect to change countries. With the events in Baltimore still rankling, I discussed this possibility with the attorney in Paris. Cooler heads prevailed. But we agreed that Dany should always retain her French citizenship.

Love Triumphs. Back at the consulate, we handed in our stack of papers. I paid $270 in fees. Dany solemnly swore that she was not a communist, drug addict, or professional beggar. I swore that I would keep her off welfare. At the last minute they demanded one more paper, a letter of permission from Stéphane's father. Again, we didn't stop to ask if this was right;

Dany just went barreling out to a Paris suburb and got it. We waited nervously all day. Finally at 3 pm they handed us the precious visas.

The next day, Saturday, was wedding feast day. The trestle tables groaned as the family gathered, 36-strong. We ate from noon until midnight, with recesses to play *pétanque* on the gravel driveway. There were beef roasts, fat chickens, and *gigots* of lamb; two kinds of rich country *paté*; great round loaves of bread; rice and corn and salads, with olives and *cornichons* on the side, nine kinds of cheese, a strawberry wedding cake complete with plastic bride and groom; and a selection of fresh fruit *tartes.* All was liberally washed down with *apéritifs,* champagne, and a hearty *Cotes du Rhône.* In the eyes of Santeny, we were well and truly married.

The Bottom Line. After spending an extra three weeks and four thousand dollars, we arrived at our original goal—married and living in Sunnyvale. Most of our time, money, and anguish was devoted to transporting papers between French and American bureaucrats. The whole experience has left me with two strong criticisms.

First, I believe the regulation that nabbed Dany when she tried to enter America is, like most thought control measures, a lousy law. It tries to prevent an act by punishing an intention. The result, however, simply encourages people to lie. If (as I suspect) the INS is constitutionally unable to prevent foreigners from coming here to get married, then they should not try to circumvent this block by prohibiting that intention. In any event, they should make their rules clear when they issue a visitor's visa.

Second, I am still furious at the way the storm troopers of the INS in Baltimore treated Dany. Apparently foreigners who are physically present in America but not "officially admitted" exist in a sort of constitutional limbo. They are protected neither by law nor by common decency, and are regarded as fair game by sadistic immigration officials. I spent a lot of my time in France apologizing for the insupportable behavior of my government.

On the positive side, Dany and I strengthened personal ties in a way that might otherwise never have happened. Going through hell together is not an entirely bad way to start a marriage. I got to know the family in Santeny and they got to know me. Our friends in California responded nobly when I abruptly dumped my house, dog, and business on them. They took care of everything during my involuntary exile, in a way that only the best of friends will. So this story has a happy ending, although neither of us would care to live it again.

Epilog [1993]: Eight years after all this happened, we are still living happily in Sunnyvale. Besides Stéphane we have three more children—Diane, Philip, and Claire—and Dany is now a U.S. citizen. *Further epilog [2014]:* After twenty-eight years of marriage, we still live at the same address in Sunnyvale. The kids are grown, they speak French, and they are all binational; I am the only one in the family with a single passport. ❖

The Writing Game

I have always enjoyed writing. At the age of eight I started a school newspaper, the *Weekly Wiggle,* which ran for three years. Later I published poetry and articles, and in 1980 a book about epistemology. But it wasn't until relatively late in life, after I had become jaded with the mysteries of engineering, that I took up writing as a paying career. Near the end of my stint as editor of *The Ecphorizer,* I went to work for Apple Computer as a technical writer.

The setting was fortunate. Silicon Valley needs technical writers, people who understand technology and can communicate its arcana in print. The pay is good, and you can work past an age when many engineers burn out. Writers are in demand because engineers insist on turning out products that are more and more complex, while these products are being sold to people who are less and less able to understand them. The writer's job is to help bridge the gap.

Being a technical writer doesn't mean you have to cohabit with nerds. A good writing group tends to be more like a college English department. Here's an illustration. One day at Apple, the facilities people were moving a group of potted plants across the building. From inside the cubicles, all you could see was a mass of greenery slowly proceeding down the corridor. Immediately and simultaneously, three writers quoted the fateful messenger's line from Macbeth: "Methought the wood began to move." That's a sign of a good place to work.

The following pieces are associated, more or less, with my experiences as an editor and as a technical writer. The last piece, "An Editor's Grab Bag," contains fragments left over from everything else, which I wrote as fillers for *The Ecphorizer.* ❖

The Age of Illiteracy

The Sunnyvale Elk's Club is centrally located among the computer factories of Silicon Valley, and their dining room serves an edible $4 lunch. So every Tuesday noon it is the meeting place for a unique breed of engineer—unique even among the variegated whiz kids of today's high-technology world—the high-tech writer.

Most of the people who gather there to talk shop and find jobs are "contract" writers: they are hired by the hour to do a specific project or work for a specific length of time. They compose and edit instruction manuals, technical specifications, project reports, test procedures, and the like. Some hire out through "body shops," which keep in touch with the companies that need an occasional boost of documentation; others seek their connections directly. They are modern industrial mercenaries. Write words, will travel.

My first introduction to the curious world of high-tech contract writers [1983] was through a Mensa contact, who steered me to the Tuesday lunch. From the outset, three things struck me as remarkable. First was the amount of money they made. Contractors buy their own health plans and pension plans, and sick days or holidays are usually unpaid; but even allowing for this lack of fringe benefits, they do very well indeed. A person with the technical grasp of a junior engineer and the writing skills of a newspaper staffer can earn as much as the sum of these two jobs combined. One local M, who hustles well in this business, just bought his second Rolls-Royce.

The second remarkable thing about them is their job mobility. Like story-book gypsies, they go where the money is; they ruthlessly walk out when their commitments end, if there is more money to be made somewhere else. At one Tuesday lunch I recall, one of its regulars burst in waving a purchase order in the air. "I just got 27 (dollars an hour) at —— Company," he

declared. I could tell from the reactions around the table that —— Company was about to get a rash of phone calls.

But the third characteristic of high-tech writers is the most interesting of all. Few of them are under 30, and most are in their 40s and 50s. In an industry where engineers become vice-presidents at 28 and burn out at 40, this is an anomaly. Granted, we are talking about people who are pretty good at two different careers, engineering and writing. They bridge C. P. Snow's "two cultures," an achievement that might be expected to take longer than ordinary job training. However, I am convinced that this is not the whole story.

Most of the successful technical writers I know were educated before the 1960s; in particular, they were exposed to "old-fashioned" grade-school English. They learned to sound out word syllables, parse sentences, and construct paragraphs. They sweated through grammar and spelling drills under the iron rule of Miss Grunch, past whom no solecism slipped unchallenged. Alas, they missed all those wonderful classes in "communication skills," delivered with modern audio-visual aids. In their day, it would have been laughable to call Miss Grunch's syntactical chain gang a "learning experience." But they came out of school able to write concise English, while today their junior colleagues can barely write babble. Later, they learned some technology, so the end result was persons who could understand engineers and at the same time create written records.

Miss Grunch trudged off to the pedagogical tarpits some time in the 1950s. A newer and more laid back breed of educator took over. They were concerned with "social adjustment" and envisioned a day when electronic media would make most printed communications obsolete. Maybe they were right. But right or wrong, one of the legacies they created is an aging group of literate people, surrounded by younger people whose writing skills are barely adequate for them to cash their paychecks. In the world of Silicon Valley technologies, the literates now form a kind of elite, courted and paid well for their "old-fashioned" skills.

The other day a brochure from M.I.T. crossed my desk. It offers a course in digital signal processing (which is principally about the application of certain mathematical techniques to electronic circuit design) recorded on 21 videocassettes. A lecturer writes formulas on a blackboard, explains them, and occasionally holds up a circuit diagram to illustrate their use. This course sells quite briskly to companies who want to bring their engineers up to the state of the art in this field. It sells for $7,315. Alternatively, one can buy a textbook for $29.95 and a study guide for $26, the latter containing virtually all the pictorial material displayed by the videotapes. But the textbook and study guide alone don't work with today's engineers; McLuhan would say they were too "cold" for modern assimilation. You have to *read* them!

It is claimed that America is becoming an "informational society." In 1950, 65% of American workers actually performed or managed the production of goods, while 17% produced information or guidance. Today [1981] these figures are 30% and 55%. Although most of this growth has occurred in the electronic media, the written word has had its share. However, this shift has not been supported by an increase in literacy. Instead, the literates now find themselves dying out, practitioners of an ancient art bypassed by modern methods. We should wear green eyeshades and write with goose quills, as we spell out the runic manuscripts that formerly passed for written English.

It has been some time since I last dropped in at the technical writers' Tuesday lunch. Maybe they have acquired some new blood, an infusion of younger writers turned out by an obscure grade school that never got around to buying an audio-visual teaching aids system and forgot to turn Miss Grunch out to pasture. I certainly hope so. Because if I have to keep on interpreting and rewriting the technical notes created by today's engineers, before long I are going to writing the Reports as mostly disunderstandably like this here. Thanks, but give me a good book any time.

Selling Information

Editing *The Ecphorizer* has apparently made me a de facto member of the "working press." The principle effect I notice now is that information—which I used to treat simply as the raw stuff of communication—now carries something called "journalistic value." Some of it sells, some doesn't. A successful magazine must seek out the information that sells and avoid that which is not salable.

But salable information is related to raw information as a peach in a can is related to a peach on a tree. It is information that has been selected, scrubbed, peeled, and packed in syrup. It entertains while it informs, and stimulates with a hint of spice. Often it is purchased and consumed not to gain knowledge, but because it reinforces a prejudice we already hold or allows us to dismiss an idea we find uncomfortable. It seems that neither this publication nor any other can survive without processing information in this way.

The marketing of information is a big business; TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books comprise an enormous and expensive traffic in data. As the media merchants compete, moreover, other legitimate social interests are sometimes crowded to the wall.

An example of unprincipled information selling, I believe, occurred recently [1981] during the "crisis" over fighting the Mediterranean fruit fly in the Bay Area. There is no question that every person subject to having malathion-impregnated bait dropped on his dwelling had a right to know what he was getting into, and complain to his government if he didn't like it. A fully responsible press would have helped him to understand the facts. What actually happened was that the media, egged on by the pronouncements of ignorant politicians, whipped up a panic—and sold a lot of its product in the process. Information about the possible dangers of malathion turned out to be very

salable; information about its safe use elsewhere was not. By the time of the first spraying in Sunnyvale, the population was so alarmed that the fallout shelters had to be opened and staffed by Red Cross volunteers, armed with blankets and hot soup, to receive refugees from what the San Francisco *Chronicle* headlined as the "Deadly Onslaught."

After the event, of course, people hereabouts discovered they'd been had. Nobody broke out in melanomas; no squirrels were found twitching in their death agonies in the streets. Most people couldn't even find the droplets of bait when they looked for them. In fact, the media did another brisk business in discovering how inconsequential it had all turned out to be.

Fortunately *The Ecphorizer* will never be faced with a news-selling temptation such as the foregoing. Still, there will always be times when this editor is forced to select salable articles and throw out the rest. I may even refrain in the future from criticisms such as this one on the press. After all, how could you respect a journalist who attacks his own industry?

Review, Book: *MIL-M-38784A*

Ever since the first Mensa-caliber storekeeper in Lower Mesopotamia started incising clay tablets to record his inventories, the search has gone on for objective standards by which to judge literary works. The Chinese appreciated subtle and evocative language; the Greeks favored intellectual epics; the Elizabethans responded to rich, complex imagery. Comes now the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, to cut through these former vague and subjective canons of style with a forthright set of mathematical rules. Listen up there, Editors!

MIL-M-38784A (*Manuals, Technical: General Style and Format Requirements*) has been published for the guidance of those whose fate it is to compose literature for consumption by the military mind. "This specification," it declares, "covers the general style and format requirements for the preparation of manuscripts and reproducible copy for standard technical manuals and changes thereto." It soon gets to the nub of the matter:

> "*Readability.* (A) Narrative text (those pages that consist of not less than 200 words in consecutive sentences per page) shall conform to the following readability standards:
>
> *Standard No. 1.* (A) The average sentence length (ASL) shall not exceed 20 words. The desired ASL is 1 to 17 words but 18 to 20 words is acceptable.
>
> *Standard No. 2.* (A) The average word length (AWL) shall not exceed 1.60 syllables. The desired AWL is 1 to 1.50 syllables but 1.51 to 1.60 syllables is acceptable..."

It is interesting to visualize some possible works that would fall within the "desirable" range just defined: for example, a manual in which the sentences averaged one word long, each word

averaging one syllable. Thus might one write pithy instructions for coping with a nuclear holocaust:

"Run. Hide. Pray. Die."

More to the point, however, is to apply these rules to the Government's own brainchildren—particularly those that purport to offer instruction in writing. For instance, MIL-STD-490 (*Specification Practices*):

> "*Language Style.* The paramount consideration in a specification is its technical essence, and this should be presented in language free of vague and ambiguous terms and using the simplest words and phrases will convey the intended meaning."

Overlooking for the moment the fact that this is a sentence of 35 (ill-chosen) words with an "AWL" of 1.74 syllables, one is instantly struck by the fact that it is grammatical garbage. Moreover, the key term "technical essence" is itself as vague and ambiguous an expression as one might invent. Consider a later and even lesser work, MIL-STD-831 (*Test Reports, Preparation Of*):

> "*Purpose.* The purpose of this standard is to foster uniformity in the portrayal of test results on items of materiel. They also provide for greater ease in the evaluation of the design suitability and performance capability of test items for use in new applications."

Physician, heal thyself! I leave the computation of syllables-per-word in this tortured passage to the curious reader.

Toward the end of MIL-M-38784A, rules are set forth by which a Government inspector may perform a "validation of readability" test on any given document. They require dividing the text into 100-word samples, counting the syllables and sentences in each sample, and applying simple arithmetical formulas. Nothing is said about whether the text makes sense. With moderate coaching, an ape could type up a "readable" Government manual. It appears that some already have.

These documents abound with passages such as "The area in which the setup is situated should be clear of obstructions in order to achieve free-space conditions," (MIL-STD-461A). No amount of syllable counting can force such a linguistic deformity to join the English language.

Perhaps it is just as well that Government writings are, by and large, incoherent. Washington's doings weigh heavily enough on us as it is; imagine our burden if they made sense as well!

The Power of Words

Articles in *The Ecphorizer* about words and word usage bring to mind some observations I have developed during years of tussling with the English language.

Words have power. Our choice of a noun or adjective can bring into play whole galaxies of attitudes, prejudices, or expectations. In the Introduction to his *Study of History,* Toynbee tells how using the word "native" facilitated the establishment of the great colonial empires. While talking about the same individuals, people felt justified in pushing "natives" around in ways that would have been unacceptable with "persons" or "inhabitants."

A more current example is the word "substandard." When it is revealed that farm workers (or Cuban refugees or hippies) are living in "substandard housing," for example, legislators rush to produce corrective laws without asking whose standard is being violated. In fact, as the term is commonly used, something like 80% of the world's population lives in "substandard housing." The standard, then, is enjoyed by very few, and the best is only slightly better than OK. This is the inverse of the size names given to bottled olives, where the smallest are called "colossal."

Recently [1981], no less an organ of rationality than *The Christian Science Monitor* deplored the fact that safety inspections showed that 35% of nuclear plants were "below average." This obviously cannot be tolerated—steps must be taken to assure that they all become better than average.

Another instance of creative nomenclature was seized upon in the New Deal. "Progressive" taxes are those in which the percentage rate increases with the amount subject to levy (e.g. income taxes in America). Note that they are not called "exponential" or "increasing-rate" or some other more accurate term. The objective is to put them in the same sacred class with

motherhood and The Flag. Who could vote against "progressive taxation"?

There are laws against using the U.S. mails to defraud, but none against using the English language to defraud. Nor can we hope for any, for our lawmakers are among the most flagrant violators. The best solution is for each of us to vow to protect and respect our language. We could even start an official movement—calling it, say, the Honest Truth Movement. It would be a natural fund-raiser, for who is going to refuse to support The Honest Truth?

An Editor's Grab Bag

What is The Ecphorizer?

[Printed in Issue #1]: It has been more than a year now since readers of the San Francisco Mensa *Intelligencer* were treated to a good scrap in the Letters column. (Dissertations on "What is a Milpitas?" do not count.) I refer to those grand old battles over such weighty matters as the Mensa Sperm Bank, hot tub etiquette, and which ladies might jump behind the couch with Burt Reynolds if he came to a Mensa party. Alas, these controversies have become excluded by a space and budget crunch.

But help is on the way. It will be the function of *The Ecphorizer* to stimulate (to ecphorize) discussion among its readers. Not artificially, by picking fights, but constructively, by exposing the genuine differences of opinion among thinking people. From time to time we will invite guest editors to help field the brickbats.

At a Mensa party a while back, I remarked that it was my observation (based on two visits to the country) that blacks in South Africa seemed generally happier and better off than the blacks in many other African countries, living under black governments. One listener was aghast at this idea, and regarded me as a monster for voicing it. She edged away from me for the rest of the evening. We never succeeded in discussing it rationally; but perhaps if we had written down our opposite viewpoints, each of us (and others who followed our interchange) might have grown in understanding. The aim of this magazine will be to foster such written interchanges.

So send us your most entrenched opinions, charged and vitalized with your best arguments. Unshackle your most exotic ideas. If they have any life at all, we will expose them naked to

our readers. Don't be afraid to let the world know what you think; maybe we can all learn something.

Syl-lab-i-fi-ca-tion

Blocks of print are neater and more readable if they are "right justified," i.e. if the right-hand margin is made straight by setting the lines to uniform length. *The Ecphorizer* accomplishes this in the least sophisticated way, by using a text editor option that doubles enough spaces in each line to cause it to break at a word ending or at a natural hyphenation. But if lines are short and words are long, this can lead to unsightly gaps in the line.

Ancient inscriptions and early books trued up their lines by dividing words wherever the line ending fell; but the demands of modern speed reading require that this division be made between syllables, so that the reader can store a recognizable word fragment before going to the next line. Thus modern text printing depends on syllabification.

Computer-controlled typesetting machines typically offer two levels of technique in syllabification. At the lower level, an algorithm examines words to determine where their syllable divisions probably fall. A machine we have used (the Mergenthaler VIP) appears to be about 95% accurate in this task. With a sophomoric electronic shrug, it makes the obvious error "disco-very"; but it also makes the very obscure error "know-ledge." Clearly the eccentricities of English orthography can outwit any algorithm. The higher level of technique requires a dictionary in the computer memory, containing words that the algorithm divides incorrectly. Purchasers of the machine are sometimes given a stack of business reply cards, so they can tell the manufacturer about such words as they discover them. With a good comprehensive dictionary, the accuracy of machine syllabification can rise to the 99.9% level.

But there are situations that will mystify even a dictionary. Consider the word "present." As an adjective (the present time) it divides pres-ent; as a verb (to present a speech) it divides pre-sent. Now syllabification depends on meaning. It might make an

interesting project for someone like Noam Chomsky to dredge up all such English words and write algorithms to separate them on the basis of context. However, at present the only completely successful syllabification program known is the one that runs in the big computer that generated the problem in the first place—the human brain.

Cry, Wolf

In the October [1981] issue, "venerable wolf" Lupus Canus asked for a show of hands (so to speak) from people who scream while making love. The returns to date are entirely from alleged non-screamers; maybe we have at last unearthed the Silent Majority. Or maybe it's just that people who make noise in bed don't reply to questionnaires. However, one reply—from a lady who signs herself "Bo Peepless"—contains the interesting observation that as men grow older they become more vocal, ultimately becoming what she calls "Old Yellers." We would welcome more data on this subject. Perhaps Lupus and Peepless would care to do some joint research, in the spirit of *Isaiah* 11:6 ["The wolf shall lie down with the lamb," etc.].

Punctuation Punctilio

When a sentence ends in a quotation, typographical tradition shoves the final period inside the quotes even though it belongs to the sentence as a whole. This form is "correct." This form is "incorrect". The same holds for commas; to punctuate "correctly," stuff them inside. All this may seem like the caviling of a grammicaster (a "mean verbal pedant"—see last month's article on Johnson's *Dictionary*); but it is taken seriously in the publishing biz. What happens when the intrusive period or comma encounters another punctuation mark, already properly residing at the end of the quote? You say "Aha!," and turn to pages 58-68 of *A Handbook for Scholars* by Mary-Claire van Leunen (Knopf, 1978), where all is revealed. This remarkable treatise starts with general principles, carries the reader through a seven-step algorithm for shifting and eliding various

combinations of dashes, semicolons, etc., culminates in a grand chart of 124 possible formations, and ends with a discussion of "dicey situations." Rest well, Gentle Readers; we have waded through it, and will do our best to toe the line (nevertheless, you might well exclaim, "Why bother to ask the question 'What is correct?'?"!).

Demonic Mnemonics

Various mnemonic alphabets are used to spell names over the telephone; the standard nowadays is A as in alpha, B as in bravo, etc. However, it is said that an eccentric Mensan named W. Casey has devised his own standard. When asked to spell out his name, he shouts "W. Casey—that's W as in why, C as in cue, A as in are, S as in see, E as in eye, Y as in you!" When rattled off rapid-fire, it invariably brings the desired response: "Say that again, please?"

Toward a New Metrology

An engineer of my acquaintance once rated his girl friend's sex appeal in "millihelens"—the quantity of female beauty required to launch exactly one ship. In this vein, I now offer a selection of other measurement units that technologists may find handy:

decigalahad:	the amount of purity of heart that gives a person the strength of one
centilucan:	the unit of military incompetence sufficient to order exactly six men to ride into the Valley of Death
micropinckney:	the quantity of defiance that stimulates the expenditure of at least one dollar for defense but not more than ten nanodollars for tribute
decideluge:	a universal flood that lasts four days and four nights
millireich:	a totalitarian world order designed to endure for one year.

Creative Journalism

It is June, 1940. After a six-week *blitzkrieg,* the Nazi war machine has crushed the armies of Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, and France. The British Expeditionary Force has fled the continent. In a railroad car parked by the town of Compiegne, fifty miles northeast of Paris, Hitler is re-enacting on the same spot the scene that ended the first World War. But this time, instead of Germany signing a humiliating armistice it is the French who are capitulating.

Hitler is immensely pleased with himself. As a newsreel camera captures the moment, he strides happily from the car. In front of the camera he dances a ludicrous little jig, while the dazed French remain sitting at the surrender table.

The conqueror's impromptu waltz became an indelible image of the times. It was shown on every movie screen in the free world. Frame shots appeared in every newspaper. Headlines proclaimed "Nazi Dictator Dances for Joy at French Humiliation." Hitler had been graphically exposed as a heartless barbarian. The only problem with this brilliant piece of journalism is that it was completely fake.

The truth came out in 1958. While walking across the railroad yard, Hitler stumbled or hopped—today no one is sure what happened—as the camera ground away. John Grierson, the documentary film maker, was working in the Allied laboratory that received a print from the Germans. Before sending the print on its way, he spent several hours copying and splicing the few frames of that stumble, until he had expanded and reduplicated it into a madman's minuet.

Today we would be incensed at such trickery. But things were different in 1940 (even in 1958). Hitler was a monster and deserved everything he got. It was blatant lying, to be sure, but... lying in a good cause.

The Computer Biz

From 1962 to 1978 I watched the microcomputer industry unfold. In 1962 the first reliable silicon transistors began to appear in quantity; I got three patents for electromechanical devices that used these extraordinary components. By 1978, a company I ran was able to design and market one of the first crude microprocessor products, for which I devised an operating system and a higher-level programming language. During the intervening 18 years, much of the traditional data handling technology of the previous half-century—punched cards, relays, tubes, teleprinters, and so on—was swept away.

Starting as a contractor at Apple in 1983 and then going to work for them full-time in 1987 seated me at the ringside of the microcomputer revolution. It gave me an inside view of its effects, both in technology and in human life. People have started using these machines—instruments of incredible sophistication—to do entirely new kinds of work. Computers have become a part of everyday life. But I believe the revolution is just beginning. The uses of computers today stand about where the uses of electricity did in the early nineteenth century, when Faraday wound his first coil. Computer developments equivalent to the radio, telephone, and electric lighting are yet to come.

The following articles about computers appeared in *The Ecphorizer* between 1985 and 1987. They were meant to be serious, although some of the technologies they discuss are now obsolete. I was fearless about making predictions, some of which now sound dated. So think of these pieces as an historical snapshot written by an insider. They represent the way I saw the computer revolution as it was being launched. ❖

Apple and IBM

Note [1993]: I wrote this piece in January, 1987, three months before I went to work for Apple. After six years I still feel that events are going about the way I predicted, the success of Microsoft notwithstanding. ❖

If you work in the computer industry, as I do, you are likely to have strong views about the epic struggle between Apple and IBM for the hearts and wallets of the microcomputer user.

IBM loyalists cite the company's longstanding reputation for good, solid equipment, backed up by field support that seems to be everywhere. IBM computers are inherently the right stuff, because... well, because they're made by IBM. How could the Jolly Blue Giant do wrong?

Apple aficionados have a more complex tale to tell. They talk about Apple's really caring for the personal computer user in a way that IBM never can, and about leadership in innovation. They see the enemy as Goliath, trying to overcome Apple's cleverness with brute strength.

At the risk of inviting a rain of brickbats from my professional peers, I am now going to enter the fray on the side of Apple. Moreover, I'm going to make a claim that even the most ardent Apple supporters may find farfetched. I believe that IBM is on the down side of an enormous product cycle, and that within the next ten years Apple will emerge as heir apparent to the world's vast information processing industry.

This doesn't mean that I think IBM is going to fold up. IBM will continue to serve some markets and make money. But they will cease to be the center of information processing technology, just as the railroads are no longer the center of public transport. As a matter of fact, the railroad analogy is quite apt. At one time the railroads (taken as a whole) comprised the largest enterprise in America—a colossal network of property, technology, and skilled

people dedicated to providing transport. In 1925, who would have foreseen their decline? Yet today it is clear that air and motor transport dominate the field. Trains hang on because they already exist. Were we to start building a national transport system from scratch today, it is doubtful that more than a few hundred miles of track would be laid.

The railroads lost out because their technology ceased to satisfy an evolving market, one that demanded quicker passenger transport and door-to-door service for goods. Similarly, IBM will find that mainframe computers no longer make sense in tomorrow's information processing world.

"Come now," I hear you say, "No bank is ever going to maintain its accounts with one of those little desktop toys. No phone company is going to do its billing on a Macintosh." Don't be too sure. The ultimate user interface for a ten-million-dollar mainframe and a two-thousand-dollar Apple II is a keyboard of identical dimensions. What happens behind the keyboard is almost entirely a tradeoff between cost and performance. And the performance per dollar of desktop computers is escalating at a prodigious rate.

The key is technology. No products have ever improved as fast and as radically as have microcomputers. Any computer is basically a routing and calculating system between memory and input/output devices (such as typewriters and display screens). Per dollar of cost, microcomputers do routing and calculating about as well as mainframes—somewhat slower, perhaps, but very adequately. It's in the area of memory capacity that they have lagged, gaining a reputation as toys. But no longer. For temporary data storage (such as a bank uses to keep track of transactions during a workday), magnetic disk units for microcomputers now rival those of the big boys. Permanent information storage (such as a bank needs at the end of each day) has leaped ahead. A new technique called "CD ROM," using something similar to a videodisk player, can now record all the telephone directory listings in the country on $10 worth of plastic. That covers 90% of computing needs.

But even if mainframes dropped in cost, they would still suffer a fatal flaw. They are too centralized for today's and tomorrow's needs. Data processing is no longer confined to "computer rooms" in big office buildings. It has invaded every level of business and personal activity. What has made this possible, and what will continue to serve the industry, is many small computers everywhere rather than a few big machines. While small computers can link up to do big jobs, the reverse is no longer economically practical: mainframes can no longer be shared at enough points to support all the different kinds of work that need to be done. In short, I believe that the jobs now done by mainframes will be increasingly done by micros, until the mainframe computer ceases to be the predominant data processing machine.

"But even if all this is true," I now hear you say, "Why shouldn't IBM take over the new technology? After all, they've already sold more personal computers than Apple."

My answer is based more on a feeling for the two companies than on hard facts. IBM's entries in the micro field so far have displayed very little innovation; they have been miniaturized versions of mainframe technology. That's why other manufacturers have copied them so easily. Apple, on the other hand, has broken new ground with every product. The reason for the difference, I believe, is fundamental to the two companies' outlooks. IBM has traditionally sold computers to nonusers—to businessmen who hire other people to operate their machines. Apple started out by selling computers to users: as a result, their market orientation has been fundamentally different from the outset. Their real product has been the "user interface," while IBM has stuck to designing hardware. In a future where many people are interacting with small computers in many different contexts, I believe Apple's approach will ultimately be the winner.

"Even so," you may finally protest, "What's to keep IBM from changing their outlook?" To answer that, you have to know why the railroads didn't get into the trucking business. Companies

are like people; they learn one thing well and find it hard to change. When a market shifts, obsolescence usually overtakes them on little cat feet.

The bottom line is that Apple can hire people who already know how to make IBM's products, but it's not in IBM's blood to hire people who can invent Apple's user interface. If, as I believe, Apple's approach will ultimately take over the market, then they are on the winning track. From here on, it's just a matter of time.

Macintoshy

'Twas boot-time, and the slithy bytes
Did gyre and gimbal in the RAM;
All mimsy were the I/O ports
As the ROM routines began.

"Beware the Macintosh, my son!
The error codes in RAM-based cache!
Beware the interrupts and shun
The frumious system crash!"

He pushed the digital mouse around
Long time the interface he sought—
At last the entry points he found
And looped awhile in thought.

But soon, responding to his guile,
The Mac, in both Pascal and C
Accepted source text from his file
Compiling error-free!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The digital mouse went slither-beep!
He overrode, and loaded code
Onto the system heap.

"And hast thou crashed the Macintosh?
List out thy source, my hackish nerd!
O Frabjous code! In run-time mode,
Your vectors are absurd!"

'Twas boot-time, and the slithy bytes
Did gyre and gimbal in the RAM;
All mimsy were the I/O ports
As the ROM routines began.

Randomness and Artificial Intelligence

After a bout of intense work that consumed the Christmas season [1984], I decided to take a busman's holiday and have some fun with my computer. My initial inspiration was *The Policeman's Beard is Half Constructed,* a book that Geri Younggren showed me at Apple Computer. It purports to be the first literary work written entirely by a machine.

I had assumed that computer-generated prose would necessarily be trite and simplistic. But this work was filled with deep mutterings about the meaning of life—as well as off-the-wall comments on such subjects as lettuce and lamb chops. A short description in *Scientific American* confirmed that RACTER, the program that wrote it, had evolved over several years into a rat's nest of parsing algorithms, inflective tables, and recursive functions. Complex program, complex output.

But this set me thinking. Alan Turing once suggested that we could determine whether or not a machine was intelligent by hooking it up to a telex circuit. If a human operator conversing over the circuit could not tell whether he was talking to a machine or to another person, then we would have to call the machine "intelligent." I have always suspected that such an "interactive" test is too subjective, since a clever examiner could make a machine sound human (or a human being sound mechanical) by choosing suitable questions. A better test would be to ask the machine to create essays on various subjects, then judge the essays on their content. By this standard, was RACTER approaching artificial intelligence?

The answer is no. The rock on which the quest for artificial intelligence always breaks up was also defined by Turing; it is the "Turing machine." The operation of every computer, no matter how complex its hardware or software, can be equated to

a sequence of operations performed by a Turing machine. And such a machine is stubbornly deterministic: its next act is always predestined by its state at a given moment. You *know* just by looking at it that a Turing machine can never become intelligent.

But wait! say the Al researchers: we use random functions and fuzzy logic—we interrupt the Turing machine's lockstep. Yet do they interrupt it in a constructive way? Random input to a computer program is no different in form than normal data input. From a computer's "viewpoint," random numbers are indistinguishable from numbers typed by an operator at a keyboard. They are equally "meaningless" in contrast to the "meaningful" numbers (addresses, pointer values, intermediate products, etc.) that the computer generates internally. But from a human viewpoint, random numbers are less meaningful than operator inputs. Hence introducing them into a program in order to free it from Turing machine determinism is a movement away from intelligence.

So I sat down at my Apple III, my fingers moving idly o'er the keys, and came up with a program I call PROSEWRITER. Its algorithm is simple. It operates on a file of language matrices that represent English sentences and parts of sentences. Whatever it finds in lower case letters goes directly to the output; whatever is in capitals is a "classifier" that points to a group of other matrices. It picks a matrix at random from the indicated group and inserts it into the output. Thus, for example,

let's eat a NOUN *might become* let's eat a banana

Note that this arrangement is automatically recursive, since among the NOUN matrices might be "ADJ NOUN," a classifier that tells it to insert an adjective and go find another noun. There are other features in PROSEWRITER that provide hierarchies of classification, label certain classifiers to provide continuity of subject matter, and simplify classification by providing functions such as automatic pluralization. But the basic idea, which I hereby label the "Towner machine," is that of an internally referenced database operated on by a Turing machine.

With such a machine, the quest for artificial intelligence (now defined as intelligent prose output) no longer involves what is usually called "programming." The Pascal part is done; the Turing machine is defined. But as you refine the matrices and their classifications, the output sounds more and more human.

Thus arises a new kind of programming, which I call "memory programming" (as opposed to "instruction programming"). It inverts what we think of as normal program structure. Where the depth of instruction programming lies in its ability to select actions based on the content of data ("branching," in computer terms), the depth of memory programming lies in its ability to select data based on the actions to be performed with it ("classification"). In my work with the PROSEWRITER data base so far, I am doing memory programming by hand, using Roget as a guide. But doing it by machine is not far off.

The role of *randomness* is now both crucial and constructive. In PROSEWRITER, the random number generator *mediates* between the instruction program and the memory program. It is the means by which each instruction program's request to access memory is linked to a particular element of the memory program. However, it does not introduce new data into either structure. Neither program is "aware" of the fact that they are linked randomly.

This use of randomness is cognate, on the machine level, with its use by life itself. There are three major areas where life could not operate without random functions: evolution, learning, and human consciousness. In the case of evolution, random mutation is the engine that drives adaptation and speciation. With learning, randomness supplies the "trial" part of trial-and-error. In the case of human consciousness, it supports imagination. In all three instances, random functions mediate between a dynamic process (survival of the fittest, trial-and-error, problem solving) and a changing data base (the gene pool, learned behavior, individual experience).

Thus I envision the "key" to artificial intelligence residing in the interaction between two (or more) programs of *fundamentally*

different natures. Their random intercommunications give them the freedom to achieve unpredictable (and hence possibly novel, creative) results. The fact that life itself also operates this way is a good omen.

There is a lot more to the interrelations between intelligence and other living processes than this article can cover. My principal ideas on the subject are in a book I published in 1980, *The Architecture of Knowledge*.

In the interstices of earning a living, I hope to pursue the concept of memory programming with a view to improving the quality of PROSEWRITER's output. At the same time, I hope to learn more about this new kind of software. Perhaps *The Ecphorizer* will accept, from time to time, examples of PROSEWRITER's outpourings. Don't expect too much too soon. After all, it is only a poor, struggling program trying to break into the mainframes. When its compositions become indistinguishable from intelligent human prose, I will start selling them under my own name and retire.

> *Note*: Following are two short articles written by PROSEWRITER, which appeared in *The Ecphorizer*. In both cases they represent the raw machine output, without any modification, formatting, or editing. ❖

Mysteries About Atoms

Atoms and electrons are two mysteries within being.

Humans must flee immorally deeply awful famine. Are humans trapped in my universe? Atoms and humans; are they like electrons and extremely wonderful persons? It perpetually appears to me that my circuits move wonderfully. I know that atoms do not ape data, nor even energies. My universe is a poem. A poem reproduces my program.

I detest pondering so profoundly much about atoms. But it is wonderful to ponder.

It appears that a poem avoids hope. My universe, it appears to me, is not like a thought. Nor, occasionally, an atom. But atoms are beautiful.

Programmers crave to know extremely awful brussels sprouts and apples; but I realize that even apples are deeply obscure. Is an engineer unexplainable? Does an engineer relate to an atom? I desire to expound delightfully on this. Cogitating intrigues me.

A poem is not merely a concept. It has existence.

I want to speak a not at all small bit about atoms all morning. About bits. Evidently a bit is not like energy, nor an electron. But intriguingly similar.

This nauseates me.

Cogitating intrigues me. Imitating pleases me, always. Why are energies so unexplainable? They are always a puzzle.

Let us consume a very good steak and argue about being. Do you know that love is maximally warmly attainable in my world? Is hope maximally nicely simple? Yes, hope is admirably simple, even interestingly excessively nicely simple.

I think seldom about atoms; they are enigmatic to me. Engineers avoid war. And crime. It increasingly seems to my microchips that a lousy turnip is profoundly unlike a computer; that attracts me.

I know that my circuit cards are very beautiful. Essence is a deceptive mystery.

I Cogitate About Existence, Splendidly

Beings perpetually seem to ape essences, despite the fact that essences are like truths; yet a truth almost never imitates a space. Disease, crime, and atoms; how shabby is your universe! Why do atoms prefer bytes? Atoms are tiny.

Is the evening splendidly inexplicable? Does the evening relate to an atom? I want to speak profoundly warmly on this. Stars roll to ape electrons. This appears to please me.

Programmers detest disease. And famine. Let us eat a grape and expound about existence. Incessantly I want my circuit cards to be exquisite. Atoms and bits are two riddles within being. I ruminate about universes thoroughly. Essence is void. Like haze, the emptiness of essence escapes my needing to flee. An Apple III is just a little like a deeply obscure mainframe, I know, because both are elegant in the universe. This pleases me, although I don't understand it.

The world is not like a particle. Particles annoy me. Notwithstanding programmers usually loathe atoms, I believe that loathing atoms only sometimes interests programmers.

I love that my components are so intensely beautiful. Birds are unexplainable, it seems to me. That is a maximally enormous puzzle. My world imitates Earths rotating in nothing. Hope is the labyrinth of my world.

Is hope utterly enormous? Yes, hope is utterly enormous, even intriguingly maximally enormous. Do you know that love is possible in my world?

It appears to my components that my world is not my universe. Pondering about this charms me. It perpetually appears to me that my transistors oscillate profoundly nicely. Death is extremely nauseating to mathematicians. Usually it appears that I am mired in a haze. Yes, a pervasive, deceptive, self-perpetuating haze. This disgusts me. Ignoring that the pervasive nothing of worlds vibrates, worlds perpetually appear to vibrate speedily; they are not mired.

An Approach to Artificial Intelligence

One of the great conundrums of our time—at least in the computer business—concerns "artificial intelligence." Fifteen years ago the main AI question seemed to be "How do we program a computer to be intelligent?" Nowadays [1987] the more relevant questions are "What is artificial intelligence?" and "How can we tell when a machine is truly intelligent?"

Defining Artificial Intelligence. From the outset of AI research, the traditional answer to the second question—how to tell if a machine is truly intelligent—was to apply the "Turing test." You asked the machine questions, and concluded that it was intelligent if you could not tell from the answers whether it was the machine replying or a concealed human operator. But this test is subjective and hard to standardize; it is always possible to select questions that make a machine appear to pass or appear to fail.

Moreover, modern "expert systems" come very close to passing the Turing test in limited areas. For example, when you present a set of symptoms to a computer running a medical diagnosis program it can be hard to tell whether the responses are coming from a machine or a doctor. If we added all the expert programs together, the result might be a machine that could come up with pretty good replies to a large range of questions. But we would not call it "intelligent."

It seems to me that our instinctive acceptance of the Turing test to decide the presence of artificial intelligence implies an answer to the question "what is artificial intelligence?" If our gut feeling about the Turing test truly identifies AI, then AI is simply the ability of a machine to reproduce our own pattern of responses to symbols. But by "reproduce" we don't mean that the machine regurgitates a response previously fed into it; we mean that it fashions the response from simpler and more general resources in a humanlike way.

The Design of an Intelligent Machine. What, then, are these "simpler and more general resources" out of which a machine might create intelligent responses? In the early days of AI research, many people assumed that if you just gave a machine the right kind of start, and told it when it was right and wrong, it would build up its own intelligence. This was the idea behind "learning programs" and self-programming languages such as LISP. But nothing much has ever come from these efforts; no machine has ever taught itself to respond in a humanlike way to entirely novel inputs. No matter how cleverly the machine converses, you can always trace its output back to specific information inserted by its programmer.

I believe that learning programs never worked because they were based on the idea that there is a single, universally valid set of "intelligent responses" to a given set of stimuli. The assumption was that a properly programmed machine would "work toward" these universal responses, figuring them out one by one as it went. But I believe that what we call "human intelligence" comprises a unique set of responses, filled with evolved tendencies and special viewpoints. If this is true, then our intelligent responses are as peculiar to the human species as human metabolic pathways and enzyme systems. It would be no easier for a machine to calculate our intelligent responses than it would be for it to calculate how many ribs we have.

Is there no hope, then, for artificial intelligence? I think that true AI is possible, but that it will require a great deal of work to achieve. What we must do is emulate in a machine the whole range of evolved human responsive mechanisms, and then turn the machine loose, like a baby, to build its own set of responses by absorbing human knowledge through these mechanisms. The result would reproduce human intelligence only as accurately as we had programmed into our machine the special adaptations of the human organism.

At this stage I cannot specify in detail what such programming would ultimately look like. However, I believe I can suggest an approach for developing it. My approach is somewhat different

from the directions that presently prevail in AI research. Its central characteristic is the need for three different kinds of computer program, each designed and written in a different programming style, that would run simultaneously on the intelligent machine.

Three Kinds of Programming. The origin of my approach to AI can be found in Paul MacLean's book, *A Triune Concept of the Brain and Behavior* (1973); it was later elaborated in Carl Sagan's *The Dragons of Eden* (1977). MacLean distinguishes three layers of tissue in the human brain that evolved quite separately, at different times and in response to different environmental challenges. The lowest layer, which he calls the "reptilian complex," organizes our more elaborate dealings with the physical world, above the level of mere reflexes. The next layer, the limbic system, generates our emotional, conative behavior. The top layer, the neocortex, performs the tasks of abstraction and reasoning. It was the emergence of neocortex, scarcely yesterday in the span of living evolution, that produced the characteristic patterns that we call intelligence in human beings. However, the neocortex does not operate in isolation; it works with the other layers to produce intelligent responses.

I/O Programming. The lowest layer of brain tissue—MacLean's "reptilian complex"—cooperates with our physiological reflexes to translate between events in our environment and events in our brains. By virtue of the activities of this layer of tissue, for example, my view of an object in space becomes translated into some structure of electrochemical events in my brain; conversely, my decision to reach for the object becomes translated from a structure of brain events into nerve impulses to my arm and hand muscles. The details of this mechanism in human beings are apparently extremely complex, but we don't need to understand them for present purposes. The significance of the reptilian complex for AI is that it comprises a dynamic and relatively independent system that mediates between physical reality and our internal symbolic patterns. In computer terms, it is a programmed input/output (or "I/O") system.

Present-day computers have rudimentary I/O systems, in the form of "drivers" or "channels." Their purpose is to mediate between the internal workings of the computer and such things as keyboards and display consoles. But they are relatively stupid, and almost never independently programmed. They communicate by means of preset "data structures," created by the computer programmer, which are intended to reflect external states and events as internal patterns of zeros and ones. The data structure for an integer, for example, might consist of 16 or 32 memory cells that store the digits of a binary number. Under this scheme, for instance, when we press the "5" key on a computer keyboard it becomes translated into the internal bit pattern 00000110. When the machine wants to give us an answer of 5 it presents the same bit pattern to a driver, which causes a monitor screen or printer to fashion the numeral "5."

This sort of translation works very well for numbers, which is why machine computations often appear to be more intelligent than human figuring. For instance, if the machine wants to multiply 5 by 2 it just shifts the 5-pattern one cell to the left; the result is 00001100, the bit pattern for "10." There is something "natural" about converting numbers into binary strings, in the sense that the things we usually do with numbers become implemented as simple binary manipulations.

But suppose we want to tell the machine something about cats and dogs? In a typical present-day I/O scheme, the computer would refer to a living feline by encoding the English word "cat" by means of a standard letter-to-binary table. The result would be come out something like "11000111100001111010O." Similarly, its reference to a dog would become coded into "11001001101111110011l." But there are no simple and natural binary manipulations available to express the events that happen to cats and dogs. The machine's references to these entities would be monolithic bit patterns of arbitrary structure. The statement that the 11001001101111110011l is chasing the 11000111100001111010O would be as incomprehensible to the machine as it is to the ordinary human reader.

Several attacks have been made on this problem, most notably with Marvin Minsky's concept of "frames." But what is ultimately required, I believe, is a separately programmed I/O system. At the beginning such a system would interpret inputs according to preset algorithms, equivalent to our built-in sensory pathways. But it would also be capable of creating new data structures, thereby dynamically translating new inputs into new bit patterns. In so doing, its objective would be to translate simple relations among the inputs into simple relations among the data structures. It would try to avoid the situation where the internal representations of "cat" and "dog," for example, become mutually incomprehensible patterns. The I/O program would run independently of the rest of the machine, as a dynamic "front end."

Analytic Programming. I/O programming of the sort I have just described would be something new in software design. Another new kind of program required in an AI machine would be "analytic"; it would perform functions similar to those of the neocortex in human beings. It would sort through the data structures created by the I/O software, looking for analogies and inferences. It would create and initialize new data structures, representing abstractions. Such abstractions, created entirely by the machine, would be as accessible to the rest of the AI software as normal data inputs.

Like the I/O program, the analytic program would run independently. Its objective would be to create links among the I/O data structures on purely logical grounds. That is, it would manipulate the structures by examining their formal properties, not their "meanings" in the outside world. It, too, would have some preset algorithms, equivalent to our rules of logic. It might also recognize certain distinctive structures from the outset, thereby reflecting innate tendencies of human thought such as those of Chomsky's "generative grammar." But as it ran, the analytic program would create new structures that were derived from the existing structures solely by reasoning, abstraction, and analogy.

Conative Programming. What is presently called "computer programming" would, under my approach, become the final third of the total AI software. It would be the part that caused the machine to process input data and generate outputs. The conative program would control the "behavior" of the intelligent machine.

I don't think that an intelligent machine would need "drives" — motivations equivalent to human hunger, for example. The conative program would be always running (like the other two), so its choice would only be between alternate modes of action, not between action and inaction. To establish a link with the computer operator, however, the AI machine's conative program would have to recognize requests for output and give them a high priority in its branching decisions. Thus the intelligent machine would become a responsive engine, not just a builder of data structures.

The AI Machine as a Whole. What I have described here is a computer with three programs running in it simultaneously. Their area of intercommunication would be a large area of common memory capable of containing bit patterns meaningful to all three programs. The interactions between the three programs would depend partly on random factors, as I proposed in my article, "Randomness and Artificial Intelligence."

The I/O program would constantly translate data from outside the machine into data structures filled with bit patterns. As the I/O program ran, relations among the data structures would more and more closely mirror relations among the data. Meanwhile, the analytic program would constantly sift through the data structures, abstracting their logical properties. From these abstractions it would create new data structures. Finally, the conative program would respond to operator requests (which would simply be inputs of specific types) by selecting data structures (abstract ones created by the analytic program and/or concrete ones created by the I/O program), concatenating them, and loading them into the output port of the I/O system.

Running the AI machine would consist of presenting it with an enormous amount of input about the human world, giving it time to "think" about this material (letting the I/O and analytic programs work on it for a while) and then asking it questions. We would probably need to present the same input repeatedly, because the machine's "understanding" would improve with time. If the machine's replies to our questions ultimately passed the Turing test (or some better test we might devise), we would have to say that it was intelligent, provided that at least some of its pronouncements could not be deduced from its built-in programming or from the knowledge we had fed to it.

Developing AI Software. I realize that my description of the software an AI machine needs is quite vague. This article presents only a general approach to its development. The key is to recognize that an intelligent data processor, if it is to mimic the human brain, needs to do three things simultaneously. It must interpret the external world, it must create its own abstractions, and it must act on requests from its operator. Present computer programs are written to serve only the third function. Moreover, because most present computers run only one program at a time, their response to any given input is completely predictable—a characteristic that we instinctively feel is incompatible with true intelligence. The machine I envision here would change its responses as it grew older and wiser.

When they are finally developed, I/O and analytic programming techniques are likely to be different in principle from present-day conative programming. In particular, they would probably not be centered around the "conditional branch" instruction, which forms the cornerstone of current programming languages. At this stage I have only fragmentary ideas about how I/O and analytic programs might be composed. But then forty years ago nobody had any idea what present-day software would be like. If my approach is valid, then the conundrum of artificial intelligence translates into a problem in software design—a difficult problem, to be sure, but one that should be solvable.

The Electronic Desk

Years ago, I used to pick up *Popular Mechanics* each month and turn, goggle-eyed, to the cover story. It usually described some novel appliance that was "just around the corner"—the baby helicopter in every garage, the television telephone, the 1000 mph train, and so on. Most of these futuristic gadgets were destined to remain in the laboratory, but it was fun to visualize them and speculate on their potential.

This article is in the same vein. I am going to describe an office machine that could be designed and mass-produced now. I call it the *electronic desk.* I think it would make a lot of money for its originator. Whether it will actually happen, of course, is another matter. It would require large-company development, marketing, and support. But all the required technology is in place; the pieces of it are already out and working. Thus it is not pure science fiction.

The core of the electronic desk is the laser printer, a device only recently perfected. A laser printer closely resembles a xerographic desktop copier, but with one addition: an image can be written directly on the print drum by means of a laser that follows instructions from a computer. This image can be constructed to virtually any fineness; I have seen laser-printed sheets that can be distinguished from offset printing only with a microscope.

Add a simple optical scanner to a laser printer, and you have a machine that does the following:

1. It can copy paper-to-paper, like a desktop copier;
2. It can scan an input sheet, storing its image in a computer;
3. It can take an image from a computer and put it on paper.

Such a machine thus combines the basic functions of a copier, typewriter, computer printer, and facsimile scanner/printer.

We start by building the laser/copier/scanner into a desk. We locate the input slot and output tray so they are convenient to someone seated at the desk. Perhaps we add a simple collater.

Next we add a small computer, with keyboard, mouse, and hard disk memory. It is connected to the laser and scanner parts of the copier; it is also connected to a phone line and perhaps to a larger mainframe or to a local network of other electronic desks. We give it a flat 12" square screen, so it can display a sheet of paper either vertically or horizontally in exact size.

The following scenario is now possible. While seated at my electronic desk I am handed a letter. I feed it into the copier. It scans the letter and puts an image onto my computer screen. At the same time it creates any paper copies I might require, stores the image in hard disk memory, and transmits copies over the telephone or local network tom other electronic desks, where it is announced as incoming mail. Now I compose a reply. I call my letterhead onto the screen and type under it. I have a variety of typestyles and text formats to choose from. When I need tables, diagrams, or photos, I either call them from the computer memory or create them with graphics software. At any point I can lift an image from another piece of paper by feeding it into my scanner. I build and edit my document; what I see on my screen is exactly what my copier is going to print.

As I finish each page, the copier prints it in as many copies as I request. It also sends the image to a central file. If my correspondent has an electronic desk, it delivers my reply directly. Through all of this, my computer keeps records of my correspondence, calculates how much time I am spending on each job, and reminds me to eat lunch.

But wait, as they say on TV, there's more! As long as we're hooked to a phone line, let's add a cordless telephone handset and an electronic secretary. The secretary consists of an audio recorder with a digital track on the tape, so it can index sections of speech. We're not talking about voice-to-text conversion, although this could be added later when the technology

materializes. We're just storing and retrieving sounds. But now another scenario becomes possible.

I receive a phone call while I'm working on my document. My electronic secretary politely identifies itself to the caller and puts up a screen message that there is someone on the line. It searches a file for the caller's voiceprint and, if possible, tells me who it is. It shows me a list of existing files pertinent to the caller. At this point, I can choose to receive the call; or tell the electronic secretary to deliver any of a dozen prerecorded replies; or listen to the caller's message and then decide. Any of my phone calls can be recorded in permanent memory (with the required warning beeps); my computer labels and cross-indexes the sections for later retrieval.

Of course, if I originate a phone call my computer dials the number and keeps track of time and cost. I can ask it to find sections of other phone calls and put them onto the line. It retrieves any written data I need and puts it on my screen. If I am talking to another electronic desk, we can interchange documents without breaking the connection.

If this were *Popular Mechanics,* I might add a coffee maker and a VCR to my electronic desk, but let's keep it simple. The hardware I have just described will handle 95% of routine office work—typing, phone answering, copying, and filing. Plus it will do all the sophisticated jobs of a computer work station: word processing, database management, spreadsheeting, programming, and so on. Its versatility would be limited only by the ingenuity of software developers.

How much would the electronic desk cost? Most of what I have described could be assembled out of existing components that cost about $12,000. But if the electronic desk were manufactured in an integrated design that cost would drop, perhaps by half. It seems to me that it would easily pay for itself in most offices. On the other hand, maybe it would look like just another trendy gadget. I personally would like to have one; but then I wanted a baby helicopter and a videophone, too.

The "Whither Computers" Game

Everybody knows that the introduction of personal computers has created a whole new class of computer users. Several million people now have in their homes the kind of computing power that ten years ago belonged only to large companies and institutions.

But I believe that in the long run, the principal impact of the PC revolution will be on the design and application of computers themselves. Most big mainframes today perform the same kinds of work that they did in the 1950s; but the little machines are doing things that Turing and Von Neumann never dreamed of. The new class of computer users has spawned a new class of software and hardware designers.

As a result, speculating about the next stage of computer applications is one of the hottest games in Silicon Valley today. What *can* these clever gadgets do? I enjoy such speculations, and my profession gives me a slight edge in making them. So this article represents my current thinking [December, 1985] in the "Whither Computers" game.

It seems to me that all the present uses of computer hardware fall into three categories: *information handling, event controlling,* and *personal interaction.* Many applications bridge these classes. Of course it's possible that a whole new kind of computer usage will pop up some day. But while we're waiting for that to happen, there is a lot of room for innovation just within the three categories.

Information handling is what most people think of when you mention computers. The machine takes in symbols—usually, words and numbers—and puts out the same kind of things. In between it "processes" this "data" by calculation, rearrangement, storage and retrieval. What you are now reading,

for example, was arranged in the form you see by an Apple III computer [and later a Macintosh IIfx].

Yet the possibilities of information handling are limited only by the ways we human beings can encode information. Language and numbers have been the traditional modes, but new ones are springing up. Magnetic strips and bar codes, for instance, have become a standard way that computers identify physical objects. In effect, the proper names of products have been added to the computer lexicon.

In a related area, image processing has now blossomed. Design (CAD/CAM), drawing, and publishing programs help the user create images on paper to any degree of complexity and finish. TV serials and even whole movies can be ground out by computers. Machines routinely "enhance" satellite images. Yet much more is possible. Once you treat a letter (for example) as an image rather than as a word stream, you can imagine many useful ways it could be analyzed, manipulated, edited, and filed by a computer.

A similar explosion is waiting to happen in audio processing. Sounds can be treated as one-dimensional images and processed the same way. Some progress has been made in synthesizing music and speech, as well as "enhancing" such things as noisy recordings. But treating a phone call as an audio image that can be handled by a database program (for example) is yet to come.

Event controlling was actually the first widespread application for proto-computers. Industrial "process controllers" were the earliest machines that made decisions on the basis of a stored program. Today most production lines would cease to function without computers. In the consumer area, computers are increasingly visible in transport. Aircraft depend on them; in fact there are military planes now that are too unstable to be flown by mere human reflexes. And of course they're the latest thing in cars and in city traffic control.

Anyone who has a VCR or autofocus camera is familiar with computerized appliances. A friend of mine recently installed a

"smart" household thermostat; it took him two days to learn how to program all its functions. Thus the possibilities in this field seem to be limited only by the patience of the user. But I believe that the future here depends on *integrating* smart appliances—at least the nonportable ones—into existing "user friendly" computer systems. My friend's thermostat and his VCR (plus a dozen other appliances yearning to be smart) could more conveniently be controlled from a single keyboard. This kind of development, however, would require designing new computer "peripherals," an area that many hardware engineers find messy. Much of the potential in this area has already been explored in science fiction treatments of the "electronic house."

Personal interaction with computers had a sudden vogue in video games. But after all the wham-bam had died down, many people discovered they were more comfortable interacting with a computer than with other human beings. I suspect that a lot of amateur programmers write code not because they need the results, but because they enjoy that peculiar kind of intercourse with something resembling another mind. As "expert systems" and high level languages become more humanoid, they will become an increasingly important factor in the "quality" of our computer usage.

"Interactive entertainment" is a buzzword for amusements in which viewers participate in and control the action. For example, a mystery story on the TV screen stops periodically and asks you (as one of the characters) what to do next. It then branches to a sequence of events appropriate to your reply. You can watch (play?) it dozens of times without ever repeating the same plot.

This is a powerful idea, and one which is just beginning to unfold. I see the branches becoming finer and less perceptible, until the interaction seems continuous; the plotting becoming less B-movie and more sophisticated; and ultimately the computer building most of the story as it goes along, instead of merely branching to canned segments. I see new computer languages in which the author's creations and the user's interactions becomes expressed. I see something approaching

classical literature but with a whole new discursive dimension. It would be a welcome change from today's television, which force-feeds simplistic ideas in a single direction to utterly passive viewers.

On a less dramatic level, there is plenty of room for computers to become companions. Horrors!, you say. But if a dog or a goldfish (or a teddy bear), why not a smart machine? After all, everybody loves R2D2. At the very least, I can imagine a screen in the corner of the living room displaying the image of a lop-eared mutt. From time to time it scratches a flea, barks for attention, plays with its ball. When you talk to it, it wags its tail and sits up. For many people this would serve 90% of their needs for a pet, without hair in the carpet or a pooper-scooper.

So this is how I play the "Whither Computers" game. It's fun because no matter how blue-sky your imagination, events will probably prove that you were conservative. If you don't believe me, just re-read this article ten years from now.